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**Retention of At-Risk Students: a Case  
Study from a Tertiary Education  
Institution in the Middle East**

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Centre for Research in Education and Educational Technology

**Doctorate in Education**

**February 2020**



# **Abstract**

This study investigates the engagement and retention of higher education students in the Middle East. It focuses on a group of students who have been identified as ‘at-risk’ of leaving before completing their course in a government-funded tertiary education institution, one of a group of 17 male and female colleges spread across one country in the Middle East. The study reflects growing concern over the need to improve students’ retention and success levels in this part of the world and contributes theoretically and practically to the field. More specifically, it addresses two research questions: 1) What are the main reasons for poor student engagement and retention in this context? and 2) How can faculty through their formal and informal interaction with students contribute to the retention and engagement of at-risk students?

An interpretive method of inquiry was adopted and conducted through a qualitative case study focusing on a single institution. The empirical data were collected through focus groups with students and staff. The focus groups were conducted in Arabic with students, and English with teachers, reflecting the linguistic preferences of the participants. The qualitative focus group data were analysed thematically and then considered in relation to existing institutional quantitative data. This process helped triangulate and extend the qualitative data findings to enhance the validity of this investigation.

The study was informed by existing literature on student persistence regarding course completion. To develop a theoretical framework, Tinto's model of departure (1975) was utilised initially, as it recognises the importance of both social and academic integration, and the contribution of the attributes that students bring with them to the institution, such as prior education and personal circumstances. The second phase of the empirical work homed in on the role of academic staff in contributing to the engagement and success of students.

Findings from the case study research reaffirmed the consensus in the literature that retention is a multidimensional issue; students leave for a range of reasons (Sanders et al., 2016). The thematic analysis of the empirical data identified additional issues that contribute to early departure, which are specific to the cultural and geographical context of the Middle East. Following on from this, a new conceptual model for students' engagement and retention in the Middle East, which identifies practical ways to improve the outcomes of students in this part of the world, is presented.



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# **Chapter 1 – Introduction**

## **1.1 Introduction**

This research investigates the retention of first-year students deemed to be ‘at-risk’ at a tertiary education institution in the Middle East. The primary focus of the study is identifying factors that contribute to students’ attrition and exploring the role of their teachers in addressing these issues.

Student retention is one of the major issues that concerns higher education institutions around the world. Higher rates of completion give a more positive image about the academic, administrative and financial status of these institutions (Aljohani, 2016). Student retention has been a widely researched topic in higher education in western countries (Gooley and Lockwood, 2012). However, in the Middle East and the Arab world in general, as will be explained in Chapter 2, student retention has not been widely researched as a topic (Hagahmed, 2014). This study reviews the literature on this topic, and acknowledges its limitations about retention and withdrawal by students from their courses in this geographical region. Due to this limitation, the study relies to a large extent on international literature, with a conceptual model developed for the Middle East which is used to guide the empirical work. Data collection is primarily qualitative, exploring the views and experiences of students and teaching staff (or faculty) within a single institution in the Middle East. The findings are supplemented and triangulated with institutional data where available. The evidence is thematically analysed, compared and contrasted, to provide new insights into issues and practices in this institution. The research concludes by suggesting an intervention model that builds on the substantial international research in the field, and that is informed by the nuances of the local context. These new insights reflect developments within the case study institution, with the model being likely to apply to higher education institutions across the Middle East. The issue of improving student retention and progression is a comparatively

new focus in the region where learning from the rest of the world is not directly transferable. In line with the ethical conditions, the identity of the tertiary education institution and the country where this research is conducted has been withheld and referred to as the institution or the college to ensure anonymity.

## **1.2 Context**

This research is a case study which took place in an all-male college, forming part of a system of 17 other modern, technology-enhanced colleges for both men and women that are spread throughout one country in the Middle East. Across this college system there is a community of approximately 23,000 students, and 2000 staff from around 50 different nationalities, making it the largest higher education provider in the country.

The institute, which was founded in 1988, maintains an academic ethos to empower its graduates to contribute to shaping the future of their country by producing students who are ready for the job market, thereby solidifying its role as a leading applied higher education provider in the country. All students are aged 18 or above, and some are mature students aged over 30, even 40 in exceptional cases. This system of colleges, which is only for nationals of this country and which provides free education, is known for offering an innovative environment and a hands-on workplace, as well as relevant teaching and learning methodologies that are based on vocational and experiential learning. These characteristics have put it at the top of the list for local employers seeking new graduates who have acquired skills such as the process of learning by doing, critical thinking, problem-solving and teamwork; all of which are embedded in the programmes offered by the institution. The programmes offered include applied communication, business, computer and information science, engineering technology and science and health sciences, all of which are taught in English.

Contextually, there has been a rapid economic growth in this country, an influx dating to the 1990s, due to the mass production of oil. Individual sectors such as education were slightly neglected, due to the existence of regional independent education zones, which are similar to local education authorities in the UK. However, in this context they had full autonomy from the state's ministry. The Ministry of Education aims to eliminate these local education zones as part of its radical reforms and significant investment (Macpherson et al., 2007). The reforms are designed to address negatives such as ineffective teaching and assessment methods, inadequate facilities, low levels of professionalism and dysfunctional school cultures. Strategies to handle these concerns include: a) restructuring education management teams, b) setting international benchmarks in all aspects of education, and c) launching a ten-year reconstruction plan.

The implementation of these regional independent education zones resulted in various practices that created gaps in student learning. This deficit was especially true in rural areas where subjects such as English language are less of a priority compared to other subjects that are taught in the native Arabic language. The education system in this country is relatively new. In 1952 there were few formal schools in the country, but in the 1960s and 1970s more schools were established which coincided with a shift in government due to a new found post-colonial independence, as well as regional interdependence. Now education at the primary and secondary level is regional. In the 2013-2014 academic year, approximately 910,000 students were enrolled at 1,174 public, and private schools (Country's Education, 2017). The country's education reform focused on better preparation, greater accountability, higher standards and improved professionalism. In addition, rote learning is being replaced with more interactive forms of learning, and English language education has been integrated into other subjects, such as math and science.

The college system under exploration is committed to developing the employability of a diverse group of national students, and in common with applied higher education providers



in other national contexts these students are often the first in their family to participate in higher education, and therefore have lower entry qualifications. At the start of this research, the case study college had in place a Foundation Programme which supported students with lower entry levels of English literacy and numeracy. Those students were given one to four preliminary semesters in order to meet the admissions requirements before progressing into their first formal year of higher education. Changes have been made to the Foundation Programme throughout this investigation, limiting its duration to two semesters, one academic year. There has also been a shift from relying on international assessments such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), to a national standardised test which has been designed by the Ministry of Education to be culturally more appropriate and to reduce the cost of relying on an international examinations. Towards the end of this study the Foundation Programme was phased out. All students are now enrolled in the first year general studies programme, where additional mathematics and English is available for those who need it. Undertaking a prolonged study in a real-world context exposes the researcher to these types of unforeseen changes which are, at least in part, driven by the external context. In this case both of the fundamental changes outlined above are intended to reduce costs. In reality, however, at the college-system including the case study site the enrolment of first year students with lower entry qualifications has not changed, and there continues to be a significant number of students who struggle linguistically and academically with higher education studies. Furthermore, before joining the college, all students are required to complete an 18 months of military service after high school graduation.

The majority of the students come from government schools, where they follow an Arabic-medium curriculum. This often causes some communication difficulties for students, as English is the medium of all course instructions in this institution. As such, language skills rather than subject knowledge may be problematic. Some students come from rural areas where there is less awareness about the role of education in general, and higher education in

particular; a situation exacerbated when it is delivered in a foreign language such as English. Thus, although the education system is standardised across the country, there are some significant variations in the academic knowledge and socio-cultural appreciation of higher education between the students from different schools and regions. Such dissonance is a consequence of regional ‘education zones’ that until recently had some degree of independence from the federal government.

The college-system for the case study site is committed to a high-quality learning experience for its students, and to increase its ranking in the regional QS Arab University Ranking (QS University Rankings, Arab Region 2016) to the 10<sup>th</sup> position by 2021. The institution has therefore embarked on a significant journey of transformation to address the challenges faced and to prepare for the future.

All teachers within the college are well-qualified, experienced and come from various parts of the world, mainly English speaking countries such as the UK, Australia and Canada. An increasing number of teachers are bilingual, speaking both Arabic and English, which gives students access to additional help in their mother tongue when needed. Many of the staff have specialisms in teaching English and/or mathematics as well as relevant postgraduate qualifications. Teaching materials are all available online and accessible through the learning management system, which is Blackboard. Course books are also available online in an e-textbook format. During the first year the Foundation Programme, the assessment strategy consists of two components: i) coursework, worth 30% and ii) the final exam, worth 70%. To progress to the next level, students need to get 60% overall in coursework and the final exam combined.

### **1.3 Rationale**

The college under study has always enjoyed generous funding from the federal government since its establishment in 1998, but in recent years the focus on improving retention and

progression has increased, primarily due to national and institutional fiscal reasons. This fast-developing country, which has depended on oil as its primary source of revenue, is now seeking to diversify its economy. Tourism and international business are currently being seen as an alternative to this diminishing natural resource. Furthermore, due to political conflicts within the region, the country has been more stringent in its spending and investments. For example, there have been significant cuts in staff salaries and benefits within the education sector. Also a value added tax (VAT) was introduced in January 2018 in a country that had boasted about its tax-free economy for many years. These financial pressures have been transferred to higher education providers, such as the institution and college being studied.

The Vice-Chancellor and the Executive Dean of the (then) Foundation Programme identified the need to improve retention rates at the annual staff development conference in 2015/2016. This decision is linked to a loss of income, as students who do not meet the required academic standards in the first year of study are not able to progress, resulting in lost income. Only students who graduate are considered as retained. Higher attrition rates also affect the reputation of the institution, which aspires to maintain its status as the most successful higher education provider in the country, and thus continues to recruit effectively. Retention has therefore become one of the institution's top priority key performance indicators (KPIs), reflected in short and long-term strategic targets that each college needs to attain. The target retention figure for 2016 was 83%, and the target for 2021 is 95% according to the first goal of the organisation's strategic plan. Senior managers within each institution are urging their staff to share the responsibility of retaining students by implementing a range of interventions. Retention and completion are more of an issue in men's colleges where attrition rates are usually higher compared with the women's colleges across the system. This situation may be predominantly due to the fact that in this part of the world men still tend to have more employment opportunities compared to women and consequently do not

necessarily need a degree (see section 6.5 - Shortcomings of the Research, below). This study is, therefore, timely and will be a step in the right direction towards unravelling the various aspects of student retention and engagement that would assist the institution in achieving some of its strategic goals. Although the institution has fallen short of achieving its targeted retention rates by around 8% in academic year 2016/2017, reaching 75% instead of the targeted 83%, these figures are very high compared to the graduation rates in most western countries. Figures published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2019) of the estimated percentages of students who graduated from university between 2014 and 2016 within a given time are comparatively much lower than figures of my country's context: Germany 38.3%; UK 45.5%; USA 55.5%; Denmark 70.3%; New Zealand 73.1%; and Australia 76.6%.

In my current professional role, I am directly involved in monitoring the retention of students in my programme, which is a first-year programme designed to improve the literacy and mathematical skills of participants. All students who decide to leave the institution must participate in a formal interview with me to discuss their reasons for withdrawal. These discussions have given me access to the various issues related to students withdrawing from their institution, which will be explored in this investigation. Attrition in this first-year programme is usually much higher compared to other disciplines for multiple reasons, such as the nature of the students. Also it is the first transitional year between school and college. Indeed, many students experience difficulties with the transition into the first year of higher education; during this year, the attrition rate is at its highest (Wintre and Yaffe, 2000). Harvey et al. (2006) emphasised that the first year is a crucial part of the long process of cultural, social and academic integration into higher education. In my programme, the vast majority of the 300 entrants each semester are new to higher education. Therefore, faculty are always under pressure to maximise student progression to their majors within the designated timeframe under the slogan "No Student Left Behind".

As will be discussed in Chapter 2, there is currently very little research about student retention and success within the Arab world, compared to the Anglo-Saxon countries where retention has been one of the most researched topics in the field of higher education (Gooley and Lockwood, 2012). An internet search for the subject of student retention in the Middle East gave significantly fewer entries compared to a similar search in the UK. While this broader literature on student retention and success has some relevance to this study, there are aspects that are particular to this cultural and geographical context which have not been dealt with in the academic literature. For example, full-time employment while studying full-time, military service, and students' perceptions of the teacher's role are key examples of the context related issues that have been raised in this study. By addressing these context-specific aspects I hope to be able to contribute to research on the topic of retention. Such an outcome may be beneficial to other sister institutions which fall under the umbrella of this federal entity, as well as other institutions and governments in the region who are starting to give greater attention to the efficiency of higher education as oil reserves dwindle.

## **1.4 Research Topic**

Given my professional role and interest in the field of retention and success, the initial approach was to investigate "Strategies for improving student retention at the college". The substantive literature reading in the first year was mainly in areas related to retention from both a sociological and a psychological point of view. At one stage, I thought that retention was directly linked to motivation, assuming that students who drop out are merely less motivated than those who stay. Following the first year feedback and extensive reading of the literature, together with consultation with my supervisors, it was agreed that the new research direction should concentrate on areas of retention that are unique to the first year at-risk students within this tertiary education institution. This new direction would also help in attempting to contribute to research rather than re-stating what is already available and known in the field of student 'retention and engagement' research. I started to realise that

the factors behind retention were far broader than the single/limited scope of motivation. Other topics such as formal and informal relationships with teachers and students' backgrounds began to emerge as key contributors to student engagement.

The institution does not have an agreed definition of at-risk students. The category 'at-risk students', in this context refers to students who have a grade point average (GPA) of less than 2.0 when they are undertaking their major. GPA is calculated by adding up all accumulated final grades and dividing that figure by the number of grades awarded. In this context a student who has a GPA of lower than 2.0 is regarded as 'at-risk'. The GPA calculation does not apply to students while they are in the Foundation Programme; it is left to the department to identify them and address their needs, making this study even more relevant. This GPA linked definition of at-risk does not address issues such as attendance, finance, personal, health and special educational needs factors which can all contribute to putting students in an at-risk position. In this investigation, at-risk refers to students who are registered in the first year and appear likely to leave college before reaching their major. Attrition during the foundation year is usually higher compared to the majors.

The retention figure 2012/2013, for example, was 81%, which is attrition of 19% as shown Table 1 below.

**Table 1: College and system retention data from 4 academic years**

	2011 - 2012	2012 - 2013	2013 - 2014	2015 - 2016
<b>My College</b>	64%	81%	72%	58%
<b>College System</b>	65%	79%	81%	55%
<b>Mens' Colleges</b>	59%	71%	76%	58%

## **1.5 Research Questions**

The research question(s) determine all subsequent aspects of the research process, such as the methodological approach, appropriate research tools, and population to sample from. These issues, in turn, influence how and from where participants are recruited and, to some extent, the total number of participants in the study (Green and Thorogood, 2009). The following questions have been developed to guide all aspects of this research:

**Research Question 1: “What are the main reasons for poor student engagement and retention in this context?”**

This research question explores the factors that cause students to leave higher education during their first year at college. This question focuses on students who are at-risk because they did not fulfil all the requirements to enter their major.

**Research Question 2: “How can faculty through their formal and informal interaction with students contribute to the retention and engagement of at-risk students?”**

The second research question seeks to investigate the impact of teachers on rates of student retention and success. In particular, four main aspects of the teachers' role are investigated: i) academic advising, ii) mentoring, iii) formal and iv) informal relationships between students and teachers.

## **1.6 Overview of the Thesis**

Chapter 2 explores the literature about student retention and engagement in higher education and its relevance to this investigation. The chapter then highlights the various popular models on student retention starting from the 1970s when student retention theories began to take shape. The nature of underprepared students is then thoroughly explored from both the local and western contexts. The chapter also examines elements of the teacher's role and how it impacts students' outcomes in academic advising, mentoring, formal and informal student-teacher interactions. The chapter concludes by identifying a retention model that suits my professional and geographical context.

Chapter 3 presents the research methodology starting from my ontological and epistemological stance, which positions the study within an interpretivist tradition. Moving on, the chapter gives details of the research design, which is based on a single site case study and outlines the methods used in this investigation. The design utilises focus group methods and the chapter concludes with the ethical considerations involved in qualitative case study research.

Chapter 4 presents the data analysis of the focus group meetings through a thematic analysis approach of the themes that were identified during the focus groups and informed by the literature and the pilot study.

Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the qualitative data and how they relate to the literature. By using some existing institutional quantitative data, the chapter also examines resonating links between the qualitative and quantitative data presented.

Finally, Chapter 6 presents conclusions relating to the research findings and recommendations regarding how to address the issues that have been raised by the focus group participants. These recommendations are intended to benefit the sister colleges which form part of this context's college system, as well as other institutions in the region. The



chapter concludes by providing ideas for future research that could extend the reach of this study beyond its current scope.

## **Chapter 2 – Literature Review**

### **2.1 Student Retention**

Although there are different pathways to gain a qualification other than doing a university degree, it is an undeniable fact that every student who does not finish their higher education is a loss to their institution and a loss to the future economy of their country. Above all, however, they are a loss to themselves as individuals (Rintala et al., 2011). Equally, students who persist but fail to achieve their full academic potential also represent a significant loss to society (Thomas, 2012). Due to these losses, higher education institutions across the globe are urged to retain students (Trowler, 2010, p.2):

Higher education institutions are facing challenging economic conditions in the current financial struggles; therefore, attracting and retaining students, satisfying and developing them while ensuring they graduate to become successful and productive citizens matters more than ever. Colleges and universities, therefore, are under immense pressure to deliver results in return for all the resources they have been provided.

Student retention has become one of the most widely researched areas in higher education (Tinto, 2006). There is however a scarcity of retention research and related data collection and analysis about higher education institutions in the Middle East, particularly the Gulf-Arab region (Hagahmed, 2014); hence my reason for drawing mostly on the literature from the US and the UK in this investigation.

In this chapter, the next section provides an overview of research about retention, pointing to the gap in knowledge about this issue in Arab countries in general, and this Middle Eastern country in particular. The first part of the chapter will investigate the historical development of student retention and how that development resulted in the common models that have been widely researched in the literature. The next part will deal with the causes and effect of underprepared students at the local and international

level and how this knowledge can contribute to building a theoretical model that is relevant to this context. The chapter will then look at specific areas that have stemmed from this research, which are directly linked to the role of the teacher as an advisor and mentor and to what extent formal and informal student-teacher interactions affect retention and success. In the final part of the chapter, I will present and justify the theoretical framework that applies to the context under investigation.

It is essential to understand the nature of student attrition and its reason for occurrence, in order to find a mechanism to reduce it. When student retention became a point of focus as a higher education research topic over 50 years ago, it was initially regarded as a psychological issue, and students who did not persist in the pursuit of their education were seen as less motivated and less able than those students who kept going (Tinto 1993). Thus, the phenomenon of student attrition was often explained through a combination of ‘negative’ attributes and a failure on the part of students, and not as a failure on the part of the institution (Habley et al., 2012; Spady, 1971). However, student retention has both behavioural and affective components (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2000). The behavioural part refers to the activities that students pursue inside and outside the classroom and the affective component concerns the extent to which students feel they belong to the institution (Yusoff, 2012). Here, the focus was on changing students, with little or no consideration of how the institution might need to change to promote student success.

Starting from the 1970s, the view of causes of attrition began to change significantly, and researchers began to identify other predominant factors that contribute towards it. By the 1970s, the term ‘retention’ was introduced to describe student persistence and included the concept that institutions were also responsible for influencing students' decisions to persist in their studies or leave (Habley et al., 2012). Theoretical models that deal specifically with the issue of retention began to emerge. Some of the most cited models are the Undergraduate Dropout Process Model (Spady, 1970, 1971), the Institutional Departure Model (Tinto,

1975, 1993), the Student-Faculty Informal Contact Model (Pascarella, 1980), the Non-traditional Student Attrition Model (Bean and Metzner, 1985), the retention formula (Seidman, 2005). Much of the current research on student retention field has been influenced by these early theoretical models (Troxel, 2010; Demetriou and Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). More recently, the “What Works?” Student Retention and Success programme was introduced; this initiative was funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and delivered in the UK in partnership with the Higher Education Academy and Action on Access (Thomas 2012; Thomas et al., 2017).

The majority of the body of student retention studies was conducted in the USA higher education context (Jones, 2008); however, there is also a variety of studies from Australia, the UK and other countries in Europe. In the Arab world context, many studies were conducted as doctoral and master's theses and dissertations, which are only available as abstracts. Some of these studies have informed government reports on retention, but much evidence and analysis details are omitted (Aljohani, 2016). Two of these studies were conducted in the Gulf Region: i) attrition studies by Jalal (2011) at the University of Bahrain and ii) research on the factors influencing student retention at Kuwait University (AlKandari, 2008). Both studies used a quantitative instrument to collect information about the most frequent factors associated with student attrition. At the University of Bahrain, the factors affecting student retention were, on the whole, personal and institutional, and were mainly linked to time management and the lack of tests able to predict students' educational difficulties. On the other hand, at Kuwait University, a survey of 22 retention factors was designed to measure students' perceptions. These factors included: achieving personal aspiration, getting jobs, free-of-charge education, acquiring social class, developing skills, achieving academic merit in a field of study, high standard reputation of the university, and feeling one belongs to the university. The first-year students reported that these factors influenced their retention more than other issues. The study also highlighted the importance

of the university leadership in helping students to understand their needs for different services, and the importance of providing students with effective qualified staff. The research also highlighted the importance of developing staff skills and abilities in dealing with students during academic advising and understanding their personalities and attitudes, as well as being knowledgeable about student regulations in various arenas. The quality of student-faculty relationships and mentoring were the most significant factors contributing to students' decisions to persist.

Another study which was conducted in a four-year college in Yemen investigated the attrition factors among ESL (English as a second language) students (Bafatoom, 2010). The study focused on the impact of the curriculum, the teacher, assessment and the students themselves on student attrition. The investigation determined that factors related to student assessment were hugely influential in increasing student attrition, while teacher-related factors had the least impact. The study also found that weaknesses in all of the four studied variables could negatively influence their persistence.

## **2.2 Student Retention Models**

The era of building retention theories began mostly with work by Spady (1971) on 'dropouts' or those who leave higher education. Spady identified that all colleges have two systems, academic and social, which influence a student's decision to withdraw. He also highlighted that grades, intellectual development and friendship support play significant roles in students' decisions to stay in or drop out. At the start of the 1970s, Spady (1970) started an investigation focusing on the interaction between the students and their institution environments, and how these two concepts contributed to students' decisions regarding whether to persist with their studies or leave. Spady found that there was a significant link between the institutional environment and the students' decisions. The researcher highlighted that the attributes a student brings to an institution such as attitude, interest and skills play a significant role in promoting a positive student-institution interaction. Spady assumed that

the level of this interaction determined each student's level of commitment to the institution, not realising that there are other factors involved in persistence, such as academic achievement and personal circumstances (Tinto, 1975). In the context of this study, there is a lack of emphasis placed on interactions and their contribution to student retention; this is due to the fact that student interaction is often seen as a contributor to student persistence and not as the decisive element. Moreover, Spady's model did not specify the nature of this interaction or, more specifically, how students interact nor what the institution should do to promote this kind of desirable positive interaction. Spady's work has to be recognised though, and he should take credit for his systematic approach to examining retention, which was not known before the seventies. In my view, his approach paved the way for many other researchers such as Tinto, who developed Spady's theory further.

Through his student institutional departure model, Tinto (1993) provided some answers to my critique of Spady's model, identifying two types of interaction: social and academic, both of which are vital to persistence. Academic integration can be measured through students' grades and intellectual development, while social integration is measured by their interaction with the social system of the institution such as peers and faculty interaction and taking part in extra and co-curricular activities (Kuh et al., 2006). Tinto's views are aligned with Spady's in the sense that they both acknowledge the fact that students interact differently, based on the personal attributes they bring with them to the institution. However, Tinto created a deeper definition of the type of interaction that was not thoroughly explained in Spady's model. Tinto's interactionalist model compared student integration to Durkheim's theory of suicide (Durkheim, 1961). The theory stipulates that suicide is more likely to happen amongst people who are not integrated into society; so students who are not integrated with/into their community are more likely to leave their institution (symbolic suicide). Tinto's interactionalist model tends to focus on what students bring with them to the institution and how that affects the way they are going to integrate within the institution. It

does not thoroughly deal with the roles of the organisation in providing adequate conditions that enable students to interact, integrate and thrive. Tinto's model has become very popular over the last four decades, not just because it addresses social and academic integration but mainly because it has been investigated, modified and developed by many researchers. Terenzini and Pascarella (1980) conducted studies to validate this theory; Braxton et al. (2000) found that aspects of social integration were not explained in Tinto's model. While recognising the attributes that students bring with them in shaping their persistence, these researchers emphasised the importance of the institution and its faculty, as these two variables also play a role in fostering academic and social integration. In the context under investigation, students' social and academic integration is one factor that contributes to persistence, but there is also a large number of students who are socially and academically integrated but fail to persist for external reasons that are beyond the institution's control. Examples include the introduction of the one-year compulsory military service which will be investigated in later parts of this chapter and in Chapter 5. There are also health, psychological and emotional issues that can cause attrition amongst students who are very well-integrated.

Pascarella (1980) took the notion of student interaction to a different level by suggesting that students' informal interactions with faculty members could increase the level of their institutional commitment and help reduce the risk of dropout. He also argued that this assumption was targeted at students with little institutional commitment. Like the previously mentioned models (Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1993) Pascarella also emphasised the role of individual students' attributes such as personality, skills, prior education and their family environments as main factors influencing dropout. He went deeper by noting that different forms of student-faculty interaction have various levels of influence, but the most positive impact comes from interactions that happen outside the formal classroom context. Interestingly, when meeting former students who graduated or left our college long ago, they

often talk about their informal interactions with teachers as their good memories about college; they very rarely refer to regular interactions with staff in the classroom as something they remember or value. The relationships between staff and students were also identified in the 'What Works, Student Retention and Success' project (Thomas 2012; Thomas et al., 2017) as an enabler for student engagement and success in higher education. My observations as a researcher are aligned with Pascarella's informal interaction view because I have experienced the level of commitment and attachment of students who regularly interact with members of staff. However, we cannot rely on these student-teacher interactions as the only strategy for addressing retention because, as mentioned previously, retention is a multidimensional phenomenon that cannot be narrowed down to one all-powerful contributing factor (Sanders et al., 2016). Addressing other issues such as family circumstances, financial difficulties, academic ability, academic and institutional integration and what students bring with them to the institution are equally important to their persistence and success. Student-teacher interaction is investigated further in this research to determine its impact on student retention and success.

The term non-traditional students in the USA generally refers to postsecondary students, 25 years of age and older, who are returning to higher education or starting it at a later age (Bye et al., 2007). These are mainly mature students who usually have family and work commitments, as well as other personal circumstances that can interfere with successful completion of educational objectives. Traditional students are those aged 21 and younger who are most likely to have followed an unbroken path through the formal education system (Bye et al., 2007). In the context under study, traditional students are aged 18 and over and they usually join higher education straight after high school. They do not have any major work or family responsibilities, unlike in the UK where an increasing number of students have employment commitments to fund their higher education. A large number of the college's employed evening students in this study fall into the category of non-traditional



students. They commute to other towns every day and spend around three hours driving. They are then expected to report to college at 3:30 pm to start their evening classes which last till 8:30 pm, after spending six or seven hours at work in the morning. These students have little opportunity to interact with their college's internal social system, which is mainly available to traditional students who attend their classes during the day. Bean and Metzner (1985) argued that there is an overemphasis on the importance of social integration in many retention models, but this has minimal impact on non-traditional students who are affected by other issues such as finance, and working hours, outside encouragement and family responsibilities. Bean and Metzner (1985) argued that it was important to explain the retention of the non-traditional students from a different perspective that gives more importance to external factors, as opposed to the social network within an institution. They further claim that a student's intention to leave is more influenced by psychological outcomes than by academic variables. In my context, I find that academic and psychological factors are directly linked and each one affects the other, as will be discussed later. Bean and Metzner (1985) described their non-traditional undergraduate student attrition model as having some similarities with previous models, but their initiative focused on a different type of student: the non-traditional commuter student. The concept of 'commuter student' usually refers to those students whose place of residence while attending college is not in a campus residence hall (Jacoby, 2000). However, in this study it relates to students who travel for long hours to get to college each day. A small number of our employed evening students fall into this category of 'non-traditional commuter' students.

Other researchers, such as Seidman (2005, p.283), have offered theories to explore the topic of retention, such as the formula regarding retention where he tried to give a mathematical dimension to retention which he presented as a formula that provides institutions with an interesting course of action. Seidman's model states that:

$$\textit{Retention} = \textit{Early identification} + (\textit{Early} + \textit{Intensive} + \textit{Continuous}) \textit{ Intervention}.$$

Early intervention means starting the intervention at the earliest time possible after identification of the problem. Some institutions have early intervention programmes in place which can even begin before students join them. For example, identifying students who are at-risk of failing English can be achieved through diagnostic tests, so students are placed in the right academic level and/or placed in college readiness courses.

‘Intensive intervention’ refers to creating a response that is intense or strong enough to create the desired change. For example, students can spend up to two or more hours per day in an early intervention programme that addresses their needs. Once a student has demonstrated that he has mastered the necessary skills he can leave the intervention programme. A student who has a weakness in their writing competency will need regular support for a prolonged period. Continuous intervention requires a response that persists until the change is implemented. If a student has social or special educational needs, the intervention can continue throughout their college career and beyond. To sum up, Seidman's formula aims: a) to identify a student in need of academic and/or social assistance as early as possible, b) assess his/her needs, c) prescribe an intervention, and d) monitor, assess, and adjust the response as necessary. Early intervention is only useful when the institution has the appropriate resources to deal with the issues that have been identified. Even when there are mechanisms for early identification, it is a major challenge to determine all cases early enough. Due to lack of expertise in my context, it sometimes takes as long as six months or a whole year before finding out that a student has a special requirement, or a disability such as dyslexia, as will be highlighted in Chapter 5. Seidman's model provides an exciting approach to student retention, but it does not give examples of how this model can be applied to students who are at-risk of dropping out.

It is worth noting that the main emphasis of student retention research during the last few decades has been the implementation of these theoretical frameworks into practice. Tinto (2006, p.4) described this period as characterised by “a heightened focus on what works”.

As a result, educational institutions around the world now have a better understanding of the factors involved in student retention and attrition (Tinto, 2010). However, these models have been largely developed in the USA, and they are not necessarily applicable in the context of the Arab region. In Europe the term 'habitus' or 'field' was coined by Bourdieu to refer to the norms and practices of particular social classes or groups (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Bourdieu's notion of habitus, is deeply rooted in his extensive fieldwork among the Berber Kabyle minority in Algeria between 1958 and 1960. It has been influential in European ideas around access to, and participation in, higher education but is not so helpful in thinking about retention in my context where the student body is much more homogenous. Bourdieu (1973) argued that a person's habitus develops according to how much cultural capital they possess. Cultural capital refers to the linguistic and cultural competence which is frequently found amongst people of higher class and less frequently among the lower classes. Thomas (2012) developed Bourdieu's institution habitus concept and referred to nurturing the culture of 'student-belonging' as a modern approach to student retention. This student-belonging can be promoted through various methods such as peer mentoring, fostering the sense of belonging and increasing informal interaction between staff and students.

The next section of this literature review investigates aspects of student retention and success cited in the literature which have relevance to this case-study's context.

## **2.3 Underprepared Students**

To better understand the issue of underprepared students in the context under investigation, it is essential to understand the overall picture of the region that has led to the increase of this type of students. Widening access and participation in higher education has seen a great interest in recent years at the global and Arab region levels (Al Dequi, 2015). Arab countries have witnessed a remarkable demographic growth as the population reached 370 million in 2013 with a 2.4% population increase compared to the world at 1.6% with Western countries

like the USA, 0.8% and Europe 0.3%. The population increase has varied between Arab countries. A study by Al Dequi's (2015) revealed that the increase reached 1.07% in Tunisia, 3.16% in Sudan, 3.24% in Libya, 3.86% in Jordan, 2.23% in Iraq, with one in every five people aged between 15 and 25; this is a demographic which will exert pressure for decades to come to meet their educational needs. The authorities in these countries are aware that if these needs are not met, there will be social consequences such as unemployment, poverty and instability. The education policies in the Arab world indicate that there is a tendency toward increasing the number of students to ensure social justice compared to previous years when education was only accessible to an elite group. The UNESCO statistics indicate that there is an increase in the number of higher education students in the Arab world, reaching around 49 million students in 2014. This widening access has created implications that have affected the quality of education, since the increase in student numbers has not been met with a clear strategy such as increased staffing, improved facilities, and research. There has also been a steady decrease in financing higher education in the Arab world. Compared to Western countries the amount Arab countries spend on education is quite low. In 2014, for example, 28 billion US\$ was spent at Harvard University alone, compared to US\$2.46 billion in the King Saud University in Saudi Arabia, which was the highest university budget in the Arab world. As a result of insufficient funding and other variables, it is common in the Arab world to find students in higher education who do not meet the basic admission requirement to access their major in higher education. The transition from school to higher education, where they do not have a preparatory year, can create an obstacle for students from social, economic and academic angles (Abdelaal, 2010). These obstacles requires students to acquire the necessary academic skills to facilitate success (Al Shehri, 2012). Student success in the preparatory year plays a significant role in shaping students' academic studies and future career paths (Al Katheri, 2014). In the context under investigation, the government has vowed to eliminate all remedial programmes in government-funded tertiary education institutions by 2021. This development will be achieved by implementing

measures in high school to ensure that all students have met the required English language benchmarks. However, as is discussed in this section, students' literacy skills are only a minor part of what causes students to be underprepared, and the issue is likely to stay for many years to come.

There are various other reasons that lead these students to be at risk in this context. Unlike the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom, students in the Gulf-Arab region start to show an interest in an institution only a few months before the start of the year (Lane, 2011). This could mean that they spend less time thinking about their college major, with perhaps little help from school counsellors, to explore their fit for a specific institution or major (Hagahmed, 2014).

Many students in the Gulf-Arab region lack the English language necessary to succeed in institutions offering high-quality education (Lane, 2011). The reality is that students begin their tertiary education with insufficient levels of English to allow them to learn when English is the medium of instruction (Tabari, 2014). Their imperfect mastery of English prevents them from engaging with the curriculum in an effective manner. Students often come from Arabic-medium high schools, where the majority of teachers are Arabic speakers, and initially struggle at our college where most of the first year English teachers are native monolinguals. These students are therefore required to enter a college 'readiness' programme which is also called a 'preparedness' or 'remedial' programme. In the context under investigation, it is referred to as the GARD (Graduate Academic Requirements Division) which targets first-year students through equipping them with the necessary skills to access their specialisation. These skills usually include English as a foreign language, Arabic, and mathematics. To exit the English foundation courses, students were required, up to 2018, to take an international English proficiency exam, such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), or the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) which have now been replaced by an in-house exam. For the IELTS exam, students were

required to achieve a band five average across the four language skills, listening, reading, writing and speaking (Tabari, 2014).

It is also common to find students who meet the basic skills that are required for admission, and yet they are not prepared in other ways to succeed in higher education (Sparkman et al., 2012). Not all students who meet the English requirements are prepared. Indeed many of these students lack some necessary basic skills for success in higher education. These are sometimes called 'high cognitive skills' (Crowe et al., 2008), and include critical thinking and problem-solving. Ideally, these should be acquired at school to ensure better success opportunities in higher education. Unfortunately, and until very recently, relevant literature on Arab mainstream education and in many underdeveloped countries indicated that pedagogical practices at school encourage submission, obedience, rote learning subordination, and compliance rather than critical thinking (Hayes et al., 2011). It would, therefore, be ideal if students could be referred or encouraged to attend readiness courses during the summer break to address the gap between their knowledge and what is required to succeed.

Although academic readiness and college preparedness have been common research topics, there is still a lack of a universally accepted definition of readiness and preparedness, and they are often used interchangeably in the research. The National Assessment Governing Board (2009) differentiates between the two terms; preparedness represents the academic knowledge and skill levels in reading and mathematics that are necessary for entry to a credit-bearing general education course that fulfils degree requirements. Academic preparedness is different from college readiness because, in addition to academic skills, readiness encompasses behavioural aspects of individual performance related to success. Readiness includes characteristics such as persistence, time management, interpersonal skills, and knowledge of the context of college. This definition indicates that students who fall short of academic and skill expectations would be considered underprepared. Other

definitions of readiness include non-cognitive and non-academic aspects, such as work ethic, parental or family resources, and the student's personality including persistence (Porter and Polikoff, 2012).

Identifying students who are underprepared is not straightforward. While identifying the factors that exist in the holistic preparation of a student for higher education, the research often focuses solely on indicators of academic performance, such as test scores and grade point averages (Porter and Polikoff, 2012). Students' high school grades do reflect some non-cognitive factors and therefore can be indicative of student retention potential in higher education. Komarraju et al. (2013) suggested that standardised test scores are a good indicator of future performance in higher education. Sullivan and Nielsen (2013) also have a similar view, suggesting that the best indication of college readiness is in students' class performances. Singell and Waddell (2010) countered by noting that in-class performance and exam scores are insignificant when predicting college performance. In my view, these conflicting views are caused by the fact that students' grades do not necessarily measure the cognitive abilities which are important in defining underprepared students. The reason that academic grades for some researchers are a good indicator of potential is because they can be standardised. In the context under investigation, students' preparedness is measured by their English placement test score, as mentioned earlier. Students who have an academic IELTS score of 5 or an English SAT of 1100 and over are regarded as prepared. However, the issue is more complex because these English scores are not necessarily a good indicator. For example, a student who gets a band 5 in IELTS is regarded as prepared but that student can score as low as 3.5 in important skills such as writing and still get a 5 and progress to his major. Such students would struggle as they do not have enough English to write basic reports or essays. On the other hand, we receive students with very high school averages, who excel in an Arabic curriculum, but are regarded as unprepared because they do not meet the

English requirements. These students are at-risk of dropping out from college, as they are unprepared for the learning challenges they will face, which makes them less likely to graduate, either because they are dismissed by the institution, or they leave voluntarily (Sherwin, 2012). A large proportion of these students are referred to as high-risk students because they are not only academically underprepared, but other factors make them even less likely to succeed in higher education (Malik, 2011). Examples of high-risk students in this context are students who join the lower end of the Foundation Programme due to their very low English literacy levels. Students with cognitive difficulties are also in the high-risk category, especially when our institution does not have the resources and expertise to meet their needs.

Underprepared students face many academic challenges that hinder their success in higher education. Fowler and Boylan (2010) suggested that increases in student success and retention can be achieved if educators also address other non-academic factors and personal issues that are related to their success. The authors identified: a) clear student guidelines, b) integrating first-year transition coursework, c) intrusive academic advising to address non-academic issues and d) personal factors. Their study revealed that students who went through an underprepared students' success programme scored an increase from 1.503 to 2.151 in the mean grade point average (GPA) as compared to students who did not go through such a programme. Data of students who join remediation programmes showed high numbers of high school leavers do need to be enrolled in such programmes.

The 2016 national report from the Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE) showed that 60% of community college students in the USA require at least some developmental education. The disconnection between high school graduation requirements and college readiness is real; a situation which leaves institutions like mine needing to prepare these students for higher education to increase their chances of success. In 2018, 58% of the freshmen who joined our institution did not meet the English requirements to



join their major and only 10% of the remaining 42% had met the mathematics requirements upon leaving school. This was a slight improvement compared to the previous three years (2017: 62%; 2016: 67 % and 2015: 70 %). The increase could be due to the schools' reform measures mentioned in Chapter 1. It is evident that this issue is rooted in the early years at schools and it will take some time before the reform measures bear fruitful results. Elsewhere, such as the USA, the issue is great too as data from the CCCSE report (2016) showed that 65% to 70% of students believe their placement in developmental education is appropriate.

Due to political and budget pressures, some higher education institutions tend to adopt an approach of maximum retention at any cost (Smith and Beggs, 2003). This method has adverse long-term effects because enrolling students with low academic standards to improve numbers can have knock-on effects on the students and the institution alike. We can risk having lower progression and graduation rates, and students can spend up to three years in the Foundation Programme and fail to achieve the benchmark that allows them to progress to their programme choice. In line with this argument Smith and Beggs (2003) suggested a paradigm shift to student retention which aims for an optimum rather than maximum retention and called for a 'student satisfaction' approach, similar to what is known in the business world as 'customer satisfaction'. This institution has already committed itself to remain as the largest higher education provider in the country, with maximum retention as its aim. This commitment has resulted in enrolling some underprepared students who struggle to progress to their majors. Chapter 5 will explore the effects of enrolling these under-prepared students on both retention and success.

The country has committed to provide open access to higher education to all its high school leavers. However, it is important to note that there is a downside to the ideal of higher education for all because college may not be the best fit for every student. However, due to the college-for-all policy in this context, or as it is generally referred to here "no student

should be left behind”, the majority of high school students tend to join higher education. The fact that education tuition is free in my institution makes it even more of a desirable destination for students who are seeking to gain a degree. College for all also discourages high school students from considering other options, such as associate degrees, vocational certificates and diplomas, and other potential career routes. When not provided with adequate funding, access for all also entails colleges lowering students’ expectations due to lack of additional funding to meet the student influx. For example, two sister institutions which are also federally funded have increased their English placement exam entry requirements, starting from autumn, 2019; an increment which will leave a large number of students needing to join my institution. However, this institution has not been given any additional funds to meet the expected influx of new students, resulting in overstretched resources and negative consequences for existing and new students alike, as well as the faculty members. This unfortunate situation also makes their high school efforts irrelevant to their future careers (Rosenbaum, 2011). Institutions are then obliged to offer remedial courses to new students, which stretches their resources ever more. At the same time, the students face the unexpected reality of having to work too hard, especially those who are unlikely to succeed. Particularly affected are our lower level students who often complain about having 28 hours of English input each week. It is, therefore, crucial that students set goals to succeed in higher education as early as the eighth grade (age 13), so they are aware of the importance of succeeding in high school to avoid remedial coursework in college (Rosenbaum, 2011). For example, they need to be prepared for a placement test that decides the type of access they get at their higher education.

Not all students fail in higher education because they are underprepared; in reality there are many other factors that influence their decision making. Some students fail academically due to a multitude of causes such as illness, family problems, employment demands, attendance and motivation (Sullivan and Nielsen, 2013). Due to the multidimensional nature

of student retention, higher education institutions need to understand the existence of factors that are not diagnosed through placement tests, such as self-discipline and determination.

To sum up, the major findings of the literature addressing underprepared students indicates that there is still much to be learned about the characteristics of such postsecondary students, and the effects of the remedial programmes designed to promote their retention and success. What has been discovered is that increasing student success and retention may be achieved if educators also address non-academic and personal matters related to student success. The literature also indicates that students who go through ‘success’ or ‘remedial’ programmes gain increases in their academic standing, their success rates, and in their first-year retention. Such successes lead me to believe that remedial programmes need further research to continue improving their impact on students.

## **2.4 Academic Advising**

Academic advising is one approach that has been identified as an effective and on-going intervention, which can be used to address both academic and non-academic issues; furthermore it offers opportunities for interactions between staff and students. Effective academic advising is an active process that promotes student development, making it a vital investment in students and the educational institutions they attend (Harrison, 2009). Before embarking on the topic of academic advising and its impact on student retention and success, I will explore the definition of an advisor and what advising entails. Baker and Griffin (2010, p.3) described an academic advisor as:

Someone who is responsible for helping students navigate academic rules and regulations. Advisors are expected to share their knowledge of major and degree requirements, help students schedule their courses, and generally facilitate progress to the degree promptly.

This definition and many other definitions found in the literature (e.g. Fricker, 2015) do not specify the type of interaction and the qualities an advisor should possess. Research has

identified some answers to these shortfalls. McCabe (2003) identified three types of academic advising: i) prescriptive, ii) developmental and iii) intrusive. In prescriptive academic advising the advisor has a clerical role which entails advising from a position of authority. The advisor applies the institutional regulations and makes decisions for the student. Developmental academic advising focuses on the student's ultimate goals through a process-oriented relationship between the student and advisor. In the intrusive academic advising the advisor is actively concerned about the affairs of the students and the student has no choice but to see the advisor. I am in favour of an approach that allocates a different type of advising to students based on the stage they are at during their tertiary education. The prescriptive academic advising is more suitable to students during their school-college transitional period, when they need the advisor to help them make a decision rather than let them struggle to find a solution to their issues.

Academic advising in the Arab world is not a widely researched topic, and what is found in the literature is often related to the process of academic advising as opposed to its effects. In Saudi Arabia, they have an early form of prescriptive academic advising which happens at the school level. This model generally entails advising students about their higher education opportunities and the courses provided (Bin Zaraa, 2013). In Kuwait, there is particular emphasis on first-year undergraduate students' developmental approach by giving them support to resolve their academic, as well as their social and psychological, concerns (Al Darmaki, 2016). In Oman, students are assigned academic advisors who assist them in taking academic decisions about their courses and responsibility for their learning. At the United Arab Emirates University, they initiated an academic advising system in 1988 by establishing an academic advisory committee that promotes academic advising through periodic advising sessions for both faculty and staff which is delivered through two stages (Al Darmaki, 2016). The first stage is the early advising for potential high school leavers, and the second stage is the general advising programme for first-year students.

It is essential to understand what constitutes good academic advising, beginning with an understanding of the nature of the advisor-advisee relationship. In a study that was conducted by Al Darmaki (2016) to evaluate the effectiveness of the academic advising programme at an institute in the UAE, it was found that some of the students faced were related to the role of the academic advisor, as this was never clearly defined. The results of the study also indicated that there are issues related to lack of induction programmes and a lack of providing adequate information and resources such as booklets and guidance brochures. Students also complained about the limitations resulting from a lack of dedicated academic advisors; most faculty advisors are overworked and do not have adequate time for advising. Some students also expect the academic advisor to support them to deal with personal issues to overcome their difficulties. In terms of supporting at-risk students, the study revealed that an increasing number of students felt that adequate support for at-risk students is missing, especially for those who experience increased absences due to personal circumstances.

Harrison (2009) examined nursing students' perceptions of the characteristics and functions of effective academic advisors. Of the 30 students who were interviewed, 25% thought that having a knowledgeable advisor came at the top of the ranking followed by 20% for a fostering and nurturing advisor and 12% for approachable. Although this study targeted a different context, that of nursing students, I believe that the qualities of the advisors, such as their knowledge of the programme requirements, are essential to the success of any academic advising process, regardless of context. A study conducted at the University of Wisconsin-Madison reported that while student satisfaction with their undergraduate studies was high, their satisfaction with advising was much lower (Woolston, 2002). The negative perceptions students had about their advisors in Woolston's study were found to be caused by a mismatch between what the students wanted to discuss with their advisors, and what was actually discussed. This advisor-advisee disconnect can have adverse effects. For instance, Sutton and Sankar (2011) found that poor academic advising was a critical factor

that contributed to increased student attrition in engineering programmes. Khalil and Williamson (2014) suggest that a good advisor should listen to the student and give them all the necessary information. When students appreciate the value of useful advice, they are more likely to return for more. Returning will, in turn, help increase their engagement and success through the increased amount of time and effort they dedicate to their studies.

There have been various views as to who should conduct academic advising. Crocker et al., (2014) proposed an advising process model that focuses on faculty advising. This model measures student success and satisfaction, administrative issues, and faculty concerns. The model relies mainly on a system that has faculty members acting as frontline advisors with a second line of advisors for specific cases. Taking advising into the classroom and creating a strong partnership between faculty and student services to provide support which uniquely focused on the individual student was also recommended by Williamson et al. (2014). However, Lowenstein (2015) suggested that the administrative adviser is better suited to this task than the faculty because the administrative adviser has regularly scheduled hours with the student at course selection and registration time.

Building relationships is an integral part of successful academic advising. Having a caring attitude is an essential aspect of the advisor's role in promoting student success (Ford and Ford, 2009). Students will always appreciate the advising contact that is personal and caring, compared to the one that is hurried and impersonal. A retention study by Chickering and Gamson (1987) concluded that the most significant factor perceived by students to be a contributor to their retention was the caring attitude of faculty. 46% of the respondents gave it a five which is the highest score possible. Other researchers suggested abandoning passive advisor-advisee relationships where the advisor treats advising like an administrative task (Barbuto et al., 2011; Crocker et al., 2014). Instead the advisor should aim to build a caring personal relationship and focus on individual plans. Chickering and Gamson's study revealed several strong relationships between academic advisors' behaviour and positive

student outcomes. Crocker et al. (2014) also emphasised that best advising strategies include building a long-lasting partnership with students and the advisor who guides them throughout their college careers.

It is crucial that academic advising is conducted frequently to ensure maximum benefits for students. Williamson and Goosen (2014) studied the impact of advising when students are regularly engaged in the process. They found that students who attended two faculty advising sessions persisted at a rate of 85% which was significantly higher by 32 percentage points than students who did not participate in the advising sessions. Additionally, their data analysis revealed that 79% of students who attended two faculty advising sessions had GPAs of 2.0 or higher. However, only 24% of students who did not participate in any faculty advising sessions earned a GPA of 2.0 or higher. GPA is calculated by adding up all accumulated final grades and dividing the total by the number of grades awarded. The study also revealed that in the spring 2013 semester, 76% students who attended two faculty advising sessions earned an A-C grade range success rate compared to a 21.5% success rate for those who did not attend any faculty advising sessions for the same grade range. Khalil and Williamson (2014) also suggested that it takes time and a personal touch for an advisor to be impactful. They predicted that a well-advised student is likely to continue enrolling in classes in their plan of study as well as progressing towards graduation, because they are well informed and aware of what it will take to be successful. While emphasising the importance of regular advising in student success, Khalil and Williamson also recognised that good advising is labour/time intensive and it is critical that advisors have a balance in their jobs so as not to create burn-out.

To conclude and as stated at the beginning of the introduction, effective academic advising is a dynamic process. Higher education administrators have consistently identified improvements in academic advising as a major strategy to increase student retention (Habley et al., 2010). However, it remains unclear how the processes of academic advising influence

student retention and success. This gap leads to concurrence with Habley et al., (2012) that there is a need for more research into the effectiveness and outcomes of academic advising efforts.

## **2.5 Student Mentoring**

In the international literature, student mentoring is a widely researched topic. However, in the context under investigation mentoring as a concept is still in its infancy. In fact, the term ‘mentoring’ does not exist in the Arabic language and in rare cases when it is referred to, the term ‘academic advising’ is used to mean mentoring. Nevertheless, in international research, mentoring has been found to have a positive impact on a variety of student outcomes such as: i) student performance, ii) critical thinking skills, iii) students’ self-confidence, iv) students’ latent abilities, v) expectations and future aspirations, vi) grade point average, and vii) persistence rates (Kahveci et al., 2006; Salinitri, 2005). Before looking at the impact of faculty mentoring on student retention and success, I will explore its definition. The word ‘mentor’ originates from ancient languages. In Sanskrit the word ‘mantar’ refers to ‘one who thinks’, In Latin a ‘monitor’ means one who admonishes and in Greek, Mentor was a character in Homer's *Odyssey* who was left to take care of the palace and to bring up Telemachus, the son of Odysseus who had left for the Trojan war (Holmes et al., 2010). The literature has not identified a clear definition of mentoring; a shortfall which has led to difficulties in assessing mentoring’s impact on student retention and success. These definitions have sometimes been described as vague, or insufficiently specific (Bordes and Arredondo, 2005). Baker and Griffin (2010, p.4) define mentoring as:

Mentorship involves an emotional commitment that extends beyond sharing degree requirements and academic information; mentoring relationships are rooted in a mentor’s long-term caring about a student’s personal and professional development.



Mentoring as a field of research has had some challenges. For example, there has been minimal research in this field, mainly due to flaws that are definitional, methodological, and theoretical (Crisp and Cruz, 2009). Student mentoring is also rarely examined as a stand-alone topic in the literature, and it is often found within other research such as: a) students' success, b) student retention, c) academic advising, or d) informal and formal interactions between students and teachers. Much of what is available in the literature combines mentoring with teaching and forgets the unique components of mentorship that goes beyond what we usually expect from classroom teaching (McKinsey, 2016). Also, the research measurement tools used to quantify students' mentoring experiences have not been theoretically based. Researchers have primarily used surveys that lacked evidence of both reliability and validity (Lloyd and Bristol, 2006; Zimmerman and Danette, 2007).

In an attempt to address these matters, researchers started to formulate a meaning for mentoring and explain how students experience mentoring in a higher education context (Crisp, 2010). Nora and Crisp (2007) developed a theoretical framework for undergraduates based on a review of mentoring theory from various disciplines including psychology and business. Their conceptual framework highlights that their mentoring experiences, as perceived by college students, contain four closely related forms of support that collectively form a holistic support system: i) psychological and emotional support; ii) degree and career support; iii) academic/subject knowledge support; and iv) the presence of a role model. These forms of support can occur in or out of a formal mentoring programme, from one or more mentors during the student's college career. Noura and Crisp's view of what mentoring entails is very close to mine, based on my experience; it addresses the student as a whole. Unfortunately, in the context under investigation, the remedial programme where mentoring exists, as suggested by Noura, is referred to as 'academic advising'. However, in the programme disciplines where mentoring does not exist, academic advising is only concerned about guiding students to achieve their degree, as defined in the academic advising literature

review. There often seems to be a misunderstanding between mentoring and advising as those terms tend to be used interchangeably (McKinsey, 2016).

Research to date has not examined the causal relationship between persistence and mentoring when the latter is conceptualised as a comprehensive or holistic support system (Crisp, 2010). I believe that this is partly because mentoring rarely attracts its share of research and tends to be included in other studies, such as student retention. However, we know that the earlier work of Spady, (1971) and Tinto, (1975), Pascarella and Terenzini, (1976), Kuh and Hu, (2001) suggested that student contact with faculty members outside of the classroom promotes student persistence, where mentoring is one form of that contact. Based on the results of a survey of 30,000 college graduates in a study conducted by Ray and Kafka (2014), it was found that students who are most engaged in their studies had faculty in college who made them feel motivated about learning and cared about them as individuals. They also had mentors who encouraged them to pursue their aspirations.

Like advising, the content of the mentoring sessions and its frequency and timing also play a role in student persistence. McKinsey (2016) suggested that the content of the mentoring session, and the time spent, will depend on the stage the student is at during his/her studies. The first stage which McKinsey called 'Mentoring In' (p.4) is mentoring new students during their adjustment period which can focus on student life, college standards and the skills required to succeed, bearing in mind that this is the period where the risk of attrition is high. The second stage of mentoring is 'Mentoring Through' (p.4): helping students to acquire and apply more advanced skills, gain confidence, and begin to achieve independence in their work. The third stage is 'Mentoring Onward' (p.5) which is looking ahead to life after college, considering alternatives for jobs and careers after graduation.

As with all human relationships, there are risks and benefits involved in student mentoring. The risks can occur when a student becomes dependent on the mentors and takes up too much of their mentor's time. It is therefore crucial that faculty set limits on the amount of

time they can spend mentoring, both for their sake and the students. Mentors must also take particular care and responsibility by not becoming too involved in a student's life. On the other hand, the research literature reports significant learning benefits from good mentoring (Lopatto, 2010). The rewards of mentoring, both for students and faculty, can far outweigh potential risks (McKinsey, 2016). It is therefore important that faculty who express willingness to mentor students, and who are good at it, should be encouraged, supported and rewarded by their institution.

## **2.6 Student-Teacher Formal Interaction**

Teacher-student formal relationships play a significant role in ensuring good quality teaching and learning; an important component in promoting student retention and success (Pennings et al., 2018). Daily interactions in classrooms are the building blocks of teacher-student relationships. Studies show teacher-student relationships to be associated with student cognitive learning outcomes and motivation, together with teacher well-being (Cornelius-White, 2007; Spilt et al., 2011; Veldman et al., 2013). A study by Umbach and Wawrzynski, (2005) explored the relationship between faculty practices and student engagement. It was found that levels of student engagement and learning are higher when teachers use collaborative learning, engage students in experiences, emphasize higher-order cognitive activities in the classroom, interact with students and challenge them academically. The literature has revealed a number of core areas that are essential in promoting positive student-teacher formal interactions: 1) Teaching clarity; 2) Classroom pedagogical practices; 3) Active and Collaborative Learning; 4) Timely feedback; 5) The use of instructional technology; 6) The level of academic challenge; and 6) Formative and summative assessment.

Clarity is an essential aspect of good teaching (Ginsberg, 2007). A teacher needs to demonstrate transparency in his/her approach to teaching through clear instructions and learning outcomes that help students to understand the lesson expectations and comprehend

the subject matter (BrckaLorenz et al., 2012). Simonds (1997) distinguished between two types of teaching clarity: a) content clarity, which concerns teachers helping students to understand or acquire substantive knowledge, and b) process clarity, which refers to behaviours such as communicating expectations and requirements to students. Both aspects of teaching clarity are essential to a student's successful learning experience. Several other studies have shown a link between teaching clarity and various learning outcomes, including student achievement and satisfaction (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). Based on a comprehensive review of higher education research, Pascarella (2006) concluded that teaching clarity is moderately correlated with grades and final examination performance. We can infer from the literature on the issue teaching clarity that such teaching can have an impact on both a student's persistence and their GPA.

Classroom pedagogical practices have received significant levels of researchers' attention, which is an indicator that the topic is associated with student retention and success (Kuh et al., 2006). The expansion of social science has led to a restructuring of teaching and learning by moving the emphasis from faculty teaching to student learning (Barr and Tagg, 1995). The teacher is no longer the focus of attention as the focus has shifted to a student-centred classroom in which students are responsible for their own learning and are required to be independent learners, critical thinkers and problem solvers. This shift entails setting higher expectations for students to improve their academic standards as well as taking more responsibility for their learning. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) suggested that this area of research has received more attention in recent years than any other.

Active and Collaborative Learning has also been highlighted as an essential feature of good teaching. Passive teaching where the teacher does most of the talking and students do the listening is not conducive to 'good student learning' (Barr and Tagg 1995; Tagg 2003). On the other hand collaborative or 'good' learning features: i) involving students, ii) increasing their time on task and iii) taking advantage of peer influence. Cooperative learning, where

students work in small groups with peers by helping each other achieve a common goal, is also linked to collaborative learning (Ormord, 2011). Not only do students work together in this context, but they also enrich and complement each other's learning in a way that enhances social awareness, communication skills, and language learning competence

Furthermore, when cooperative learning is designed and structured, students often show more involvement and higher academic achievement (Al Allaq, 2016). The role of cooperative learning in improving students' motivation and engagement is a positive one, a fact that adds to the constructive role that cooperative learning plays in refining and enriching teaching and learning (Ormord, 2011). In a qualitative study that was conducted by Al Allaq (2016) in the UAE with English teachers, the researcher concluded that English teachers found the structured application of cooperative learning to be an effective teaching strategy that contributes to students' learning engagement, social awareness, cultural responsiveness and learning needs in general. It also helped students to feel responsible, as well as providing students with a context to feel safe and engaged. It also helped them develop their communicative and social skills. Collaborative learning is an effective educational practice because students learn better when they are engaged in their studies. Collaborating in learning during college years has been found to prepare students to deal with a specific situation they may encounter in the workplace (NSSE 2000). Active and collaborative learning creates other opportunities for engaging in other effective educational practices as it contributes to social integration, institutional commitment, and intent to return (Braxton et al., 2000). That is, active learning experiences are positively associated with increased frequency of student contact with faculty members, probably because the nature of class activities and out-of-class assignments requires it. Also evident are more positive views of the campus environment, possibly mediated by getting to know classmates better through the collaborative exercises. It is perhaps through these experiences that active learning exerts a positive influence on student integration and persistence. Researchers agree that interactive

teaching is more beneficial to students than the didactic / passive teaching approach (Crosling et al., 2009). Didactic teaching and rote learning have been at the heart of placing first-year students at risk, especially as they are expected to take responsibility for their learning and become less dependent on teachers. As stated earlier, what is needed from students is critical thinking and not compliance (Hayes et al., 2011).

Providing students with timely feedback is also associated with facilitating student learning and retention (Kuh, 2003). Through feedback, the teacher can provide students with ongoing guidance and information about whether they are on track; thereby allowing them to make necessary adjustments to their learning (Tagg, 2003). This feedback can be delivered through mentoring, as stated above in the mentoring section. Faculty members provide appropriate challenges and support to students when they communicate with students and provide timely and apt feedback and support to meet their students' needs (Kuh et al. 2005). One of the best forms of feedback in this context is conducted in the Foundation Programme when students have one-to-one sessions with their teacher to discuss their academic progress and agree on an action plan.

The use of instructional technology has gained much interest in recent years. Some literature reports that such technology has the potential to enhance students' levels of engagement (Hepplestone et al. 2011). Teachers in tertiary education need new strategies to communicate with students of the 'net' generation and to shape enticing educational experiences for them (Manuguerra and Petocz 2011). Mobile learning, which is also referred to as m-learning, has also made some advances in higher education in recent years. Tablets, such as the iPad, have provided learners with easy access to learning, especially beyond the walls of their institution. Technology has already changed the learning experience of students in tertiary education. The introduction of the personal computer gave instructors and students new ways to enhance learning and, as it has been observed in my context, students are becoming less engaged in classrooms that do not include technology. The introduction of e-learning

systems gave students, especially distance students, a virtual place where they could access material and participate in discussion forums. Social media such as Facebook and instant communication interfaces such as Twitter and WhatsApp have also revolutionised education by providing instant access. There are, however, downsides to the excessive use of technology in our context. Our teachers have daily struggles to keep the student focused on their lesson and away from their mobile phones. Learners are also too easily sidetracked to unrelated websites while using their iPads and laptops. So, while we have seen the positives of technology in the classroom in promoting students' academic enjoyment, there are also some drawbacks that could lead to students' lack of focus in the classroom and possibly even academic failure. The answer is embedded in how the technology is utilised within the learning context, where set rules and boundaries need to be drawn in order to maximise the benefits that would lead to academic success and retention (Goundar, 2014)

The level of academic challenge is one of the areas that was identified by the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) which was developed by the Center for Postsecondary Research and Planning, (Indiana University, 2001) to examine certain benchmarks deemed to measure effective education practices. Academic challenge emphasises the importance of academic effort and setting high expectations for student performance (NSSE, 2001). The NSSE also examined other areas such as active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences, and characteristics of supportive campus environments. A study that focused on the level of academic challenge provided to students in two universities in Malaysia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), found that students in both universities spend below 25 hours a week dedicated to their studies, which is the minimum amount of time recommended by the NSSE in order to be successful (Yusoff, 2012). More than 60% of the Malaysian university students and 55% of the UAE university students spent less than 10 hours per week. Almost 9.0% of the UAE students were perceived as 'unprepared', whereas only around 1%, of the Malaysian students turned up 'unprepared'

for their classes. This unpreparedness problem is also a common issue amongst students in the college under investigation; a large number of students, especially in their first year, fail to complete their homework and expect to spend some of their class time completing unfinished tasks.

Research, especially with non-traditional students, has found that formative assessment provides an integrated approach to equip students with the information and skills that are necessary to succeed during their transition into higher education. George et al. (2003) found that the nature of assessment used was significant to students' experience, suggesting incorporating both summative and formative assessments to help build student confidence. It was also suggested their model would encourage learners to have a positive attitude towards learning and engagement with the cognitive demands of the programme. Similarly, Bamber and Tett (1999) found that non-traditional students, and particularly mature learners, benefited from formative feedback. For example, formative assessment can offer students an opportunity to negotiate with tutors and peers on matters of assessment, including the allocation of marks (Povey and Angier, 2004). Furthermore, formative feedback promotes interaction between students and staff, which results in helping students to develop their self-confidence to approach their teachers for additional guidance where necessary. Feedback can also be used by teachers to realign their teaching to meet the students' needs. Formative feedback offers an integrated approach to providing students with clarity about what is expected of them. It is also a way of engaging with peers and teachers to discuss academic issues in an environment that helps them develop the skills, understanding and integration they need in order to succeed. Furthermore, formative assessment can also be used to promote an active approach to learning by encouraging students to reflect on the learning *process*, rather than just the *outcomes*. Identifying students' weaknesses through formative assessment helps us (the staff) to identify their weaknesses early; an important component in Seidman's (2005) retention formula as mentioned earlier.



At the heart of student-teacher formal interaction is the notion of a good teacher. Volkwein et al. (2000) reported that the most consistently influential variables on students' academic achievement and cognitive growth were items about faculty behaviours representing being well-prepared for class and designing assignments students considered meaningful. These faculty behaviours also appear to be associated with gains in students' cognitive development (Pascarella 2001). As well as the issue of clarity, addressed above, other instructor qualities that matter include preparation and organisation, availability and helpfulness, and concern for and rapport with students. As summarised by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), good teachers know about their subject matter, are motivated, engage students in expressing their views, and interact with them both in and outside of class. I also wish to add that it is essential that teachers are qualified and have received some form of teacher training. Boudersa (2016) supports this view by urging the need for teachers to receive adequate educational and professional training in order to possess appropriate knowledge and teaching skills and to be able to dedicate themselves to the teaching profession. In his study at Kuwait University, AlKandari (2008) also shows the importance of providing students with effective qualified staff and developing their skills about academic advising through understanding the rules and regulations of the institution so they can the students better.

## **2.7 Student-Teacher Informal Interaction**

There is a significant amount of research that focuses on the importance of student-teacher informal interaction on the rates of students' success and retention in higher education. Before exploring the impact of the student-teacher informal interaction, I will first define student-teacher informal interaction. Wubbels et al. (2014, p.364) determined the teacher-student relationship or interaction as:

“The generalised interpersonal meaning students and teachers attach to their interactions with each other.”

The generalised meanings originate from perceptions of day-to-day interactions between a teacher and the student which become the basis of their relationship. If that interaction is unfriendly, this could lead to a hostile relationship (Hagenauer and Volet, 2014).

The literature has revealed there are various benefits to student-teacher informal interaction. Bernstein-Yamashiro and Noam (2013) found that these relationships are emotionally helpful and meaningful, and they also represent the integration of the emotional and intellectual aspects of learning and teaching. A positive relationship between student and teacher is also important for student engagement and achievement (Roorda et al., 2011). Disengaged students often lack positive relationships with their teachers, and are often likely to be in conflict with them (Jennings and Greenberg, 2009). Interested and caring teachers, who try to establish positive relationships with their students, could make a positive difference for students at risk of leaving their institution (Jennings and Greenberg, 2009; Pianta and Allen, 2008). Teacher-Student Informal Interaction (TSII) is essential to successful learning for all students but seems to be of particular relevance to students who are at-risk of dropping out. Drawing on Tinto's framework (1975) of student drop-out, many researchers addressed the quality of academic and social integration, and its influence, in determining whether students stay at or leave university (Oseguera and Rhee, 2009; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). Research by Palmer et al. (2009) also showed that students who developed a sense of belonging were more likely to persist in their university as their study satisfaction increased through connectedness with the institution and faculty. The interpersonal relationships between students and teachers have also been found to positively affect students' successful adjustment across all age groups, including university level (Bernstein-Yamashiro and Noam, 2013; Roorda et al., 2011).

The research into student-teacher informal interaction faces some difficulties. Similar to mentoring, it lacks a clearly defined conceptual/theoretical framework upon which the studies can be based. This gap has resulted in different operationalised approaches making

it difficult to analyse them as a unified group and impossible to make valid comparisons. These difficulties are mainly caused by the literature's focus on teacher-student interaction, without describing the quality of that interaction. There is, therefore, a need for empirical research on TSII and its relevance to students' learning. Most of the available studies were conducted in the USA, as well as other Anglo-American countries. A meta-analysis by Roorda et al. (2011) indicates that 77 of the 92 empirical research papers published between 1990 and 2011 about the teacher-student relationship were based on samples from the USA. The literature highlighted the significance of the frequency of student-teacher informal interactions. The more often students have out-of-classroom interactions with their teachers, the better the quality of the relationship and the more connected they became with their institution (Bernstein-Yamashiro and Noam, 2013; Roorda et al., 2011). However, some researchers, such as Dobransky and Frymier (2004) and Komarraju et al., (2010), argued that the frequency of interactions does not guarantee the quality of these interactions or the quality of the relationship.

Other literature explored the importance of the care factors involved in student learning that can enhance students' intrinsic motivation (Komarraju et al., 2010). The researchers found factors such as respect, connectedness and care were important features of a positive teacher-student interaction. Fitzmaurice (2008) also supported Komarraju's view about the importance of the care factor in teacher-student interaction. The additional care and connectedness can have risks which lead to the question of how close the student-teacher informal interaction should be, and when does it become too close. The results of a study conducted by Holmes et al. (1999) about teachers' behaviour in student-teacher informal interaction revealed that some students perceived everything that went beyond the academic role as inappropriate. Going shopping with students and attending their parties were regarded as examples of this inappropriate behaviour. Perhaps the best guideline for teacher-student informal interaction was suggested by Sibii (2010) who described the role of the teacher in

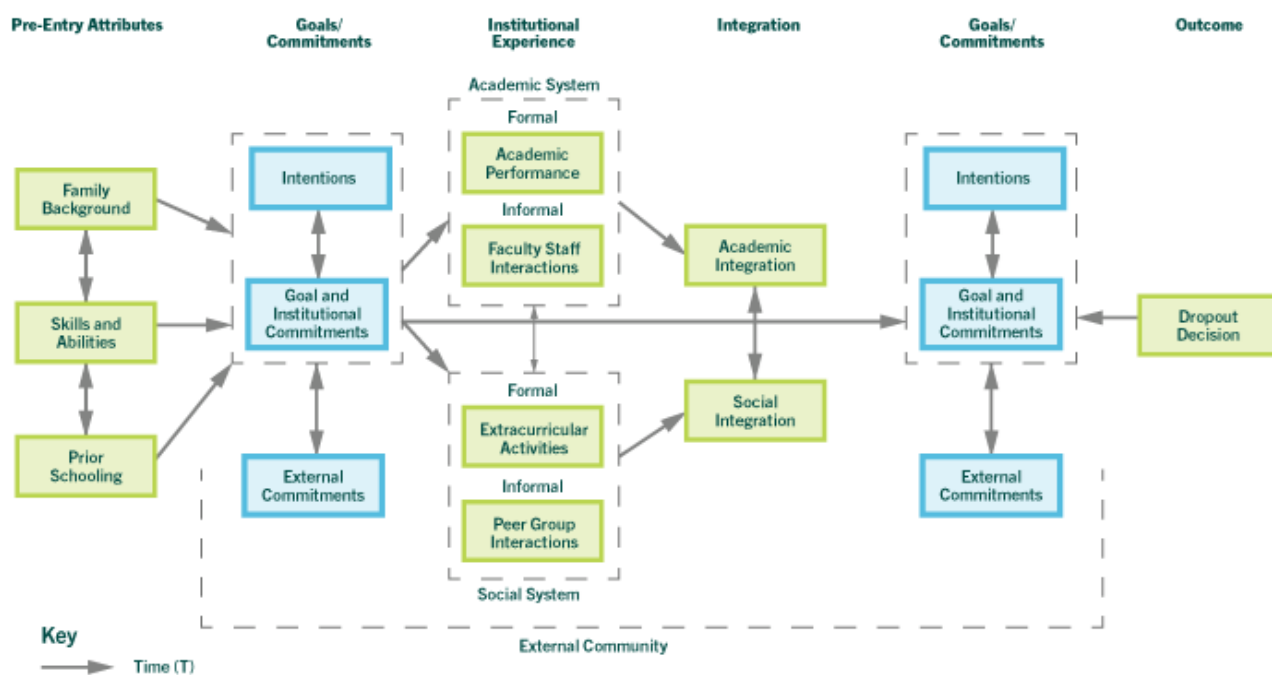
as 'a friendly individual but not a friend'. Holmes et al. (1999) also warned against allowing the informal interaction to become too close as it could be risky for students and teachers due to its hierarchical nature and unequal power distribution.

Another frequently discussed topic in the student-teacher relationship literature relating to higher education is the approachability of teachers. In a study conducted by Denzine and Pulos (2000), they explored the unapproachable categories of teacher behaviour based on students' views. The investigation revealed that approachability is a multidimensional issue. Highly approachable teachers had behaviour characteristics such as knowing students' names, staying in class to meet students, greeting students on campus, smiling often, and exhibiting warm and caring behaviour. Denzine and Pulos (2000) argued that teacher approachability is an important quality that needs to be promoted to facilitate positive teacher-student interactions. A study conducted in the UK (Stephen et al., 2008) also supports this view, finding the approachability of lecturers is relevant to student-teacher relationships as well as those learners' overall feeling of connectedness to their institution. Teacher approachability also features in an Australian higher-education study, showing the significance of approachable and available university teachers, especially during the transition process of first-year students (Devlin and O'Shea, 2012). This approachability factor is particularly relevant when considering students at risk of dropping out.

In summary, research suggests that teacher-student informal interaction is a multidimensional phenomenon incorporating a range of concepts such as care, connection, trust, honesty, fairness, respect, support, encouragement, and approachability. However, it remains that further studies are needed to standardise the conceptualisation of student-teacher informal interaction in higher education.

## 2.8 Theoretical Framework

After reviewing: a) the various popular retention models, b) the various themes related to underprepared students c) the role of the teacher in influencing student retention and success and finally d) the context under investigation, Tinto's (1975) departure model (Figure 1) would, in my view, be the most suited to this case-study context because it takes into consideration four stages of the student persistence process: i) pre-entry attributes, ii) the first year experience, iii) academic integration and iv) social integration. Tinto's model recognises that the attributes that students bring with them to the institution influence their commitment towards their academic goals and their college. However, in order for this commitment to materialise it is essential that the students are integrated socially and academically into their institution. The model also recognises the importance of having a smooth school-college transition to promote integration. The teacher plays a significant role in the various stages of the students' college years as they make their decision on whether to persist or leave the institution.



**Figure 1: Tinto's (1975) Departure Model**

Tinto's 'Student Departure' model, therefore, addresses the student as a whole and recognises the milestones that occur during their education journey and which may impact their decision to persist or leave their institution. These journey milestones apply to the context of my study in many respects: 1) 'The pre-entry attributes' in Tinto's model are an important factor in student retention and these relate directly to the language of instruction experienced by students at school (Arabic vs English) and soft skills in my context; 2) Tinto's concept of 'academic integration' incorporates the importance of student/teacher interaction which is an important focus of this study as highlighted in the second research question; 3) The importance of Tinto's 'social integration' concept is also relevant to my context as shown in the section on 'student/teacher information interaction' and its role in engaging and retaining students.

Although other student retention models, such as Seidman's retention formula (2005), Pascarella's (1980) student-teacher informal interaction model and Bean and Metzner (1985) non-traditional students model provide retention strategies that are relevant to this study's context, they tend to address students' concerns only partially and not fully as in Tinto's model. For example Seidman's focus on early identification is applicable to any context, but not all interventions need to be intensive and continuous as this study has shown us. Pascarella's model tends to focus on the role of student-teacher informal interaction in promoting success, but it does not address aspects such as the role of the student-teacher formal interactions and pre-entry attributes as set out in Tinto's model. Bean and Metzner's focus on non-traditional 'commuter' students only applies to a small proportion of the students in this study, who are in full-time employment and also studying full-time. Bean and Metzner's model, therefore, does not address the issues faced by the majority of full-time students. In addition, many aspects of these models are already incorporated within Tinto's model.

To sum up, the literature has revealed that there are several widely known reasons as to why students leave their institutions before the completion of their programme, but usually there is a variety of factors that could cause a student to drop out. Sanders et al. (2016) examined the complexity of the reasons behind student attrition, concluding it is due to multiple interrelated factors. Thomas (2012) also recognised that there is rarely a single reason responsible for student dropout, making it very difficult to generalise findings from one context to another. Boston and Ice (2011) and Pascarella (1980) noted that most student retention studies are undertaken in particular settings, and therefore their findings are not easily generalised to other institutions. Hence, every case of student attrition has unique characteristics and circumstances that make it not only difficult to generalise its results to other cases, but potentially invalid to do so (McInnis and James, 2004). To solve the issue of retention, there is a need for a multidimensional solution that addresses the student as a whole. There are common characteristics that apply to all students that can quickly be resolved through addressing major factors, such as social and academic integration. Institutions need to have adequate resources to address students' needs, since those needs can differ significantly from one individual student to another.

## **Chapter 3 – Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter covers the research paradigm and its ontological and epistemological components, as well as the research design, which takes the form of a case study. The chapter further addresses the ethical considerations that need to be observed in case study research, such as power relationships and the insider/outsider dilemma. It includes the basic principles that need to be observed while conducting a thematic approach to analysing qualitative data. Section 3.6 describes the qualitative approach taken by this investigation and the methods used to obtain the required information of interest. It also includes the details of the six focus groups that were used to obtain the data for this investigation. Section 3.7 provides details of the ethical steps that were followed in line with the regulations of The Open University in the UK and the institution under study. These ethical steps also conform to recognised standards such as those of the British Education Research Association (BERA).

### **3.2 Research Paradigm**

This study is based on interpretivism, which values subjective meaning, understanding, and concepts such as empathy and interpretation. It considers that the truth is constructed in the mind of the interpreter, which leads to having many truths that vary from one person to another. It also recognises that the way we view the world around us originates from a person's schema. This does not mean that the world we perceive through the mind is not real, but we can only experience it through our perceptions, which in turn are influenced by our preconceptions, beliefs and values. This view also argues that there are no absolutes, but all phenomena can be studied and interpreted in different ways, mainly because people and situation differ (Burgess et al., 2006). This paradigm is suited to this investigation because it seeks to interpret how focus group participants react to events that take place in their



natural setting (college) and how their interpretations affect their decision towards their institution on whether to persist or leave.

The interpretivist paradigm employed in this case study sought to understand and interpret students' behaviour and how they formulate knowledge affecting their decision to persist or leave their educational institution. This behaviour is predominantly based on the meaning they attach to, and the knowledge they associate with, their social reality. The case study also investigated how this knowledge is influenced by the environment they live in, whether it is at the college, at home or in society. The study dealt with individual students' perceptions, rather than assuming that tertiary education students in this part of the world all exhibit the same patterns of behaviour as other students elsewhere. The interpretive methodology is directed at the understanding of phenomena from an individual's perspective, investigating the interaction among individuals as well as the historical and cultural contexts which people inhabit (Creswell, 2014).

Case studies, ethnography and phenomenology, are some examples of the various research designs that are common in interpretivism. Focus groups, structured and semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, surveys and observations are examples of the methods that are common while conducting research using the interpretive approach (Hashemnezhad, 2015). The data generated through these methods are often qualitative; therefore, surveys and questionnaires are sometimes used to bring an additional element to an interpretivist perspective. Research success depends on the strength of the evidence provided to justify the findings; an issue referred to as internal validity and credibility. If the research can be applied to another similar context, in my case other colleges in the system, this is referred to as reliability and dependability (Ritchie and Lewis, 2013). Some researchers argue that it is hard to generalise the findings from one context to another. Even if the setting is similar, and the study is conducted with the same group under the same condition, different variables can occur (Scotland, 2012). Since interpretivist research is subjective and differs from one

person to another, Rolfe (2006) argues that researchers may not reach the same interpretations; a point which if valid limits the transferability of the knowledge produced. I, as a researcher, recognise that there are certain limitations to the interpretive approach that relies on collecting qualitative data as its main method of gathering information. An example of these limitations is that it tends to focus on understanding and interpreting participants' experiences rather than other important issues such as context (Wilson, 2014). Studying a smaller sample size in qualitative research can raise concerns of generalising the findings to the whole research population (Harry and Lipsky, 2014). Therefore, if quantitative data can support the findings from the qualitative data, this outcome strengthens the findings and conclusions drawn from within the interpretive paradigm.

Quantitative and qualitative methodologies are different ways of researching human behaviour, including social interactions; both approaches require sensitivity in dealing with research participants. Qualitative and quantitative research models provide two different approaches to understanding the world we live in. Quantitative research has its origins in descriptive analysis, (positivism and control); whereas the qualitative approach follows the philosophy that an investigation should be conducted in a natural setting, with meaning derived from research that is unique to that environment. The method chosen for gathering information depends on the research questions, the underlying philosophy of research, and the researcher's individual preferences and skills. These methods can be in the form of interviews, focus groups, observations and secondary data such as diaries, written accounts of past events, and company reports. There is a broad range of analytical techniques with which to present quantitative data, such as graphs, pie charts and tables. The mixed-method approach entails the use of two or more different ways of data gathering and analysis. Mixed methods are not limited to analysing quantitative data and narrating the qualitative data; understanding the people involved in the study and extending the inquiry's findings are important dimensions within this method.

Ontology is concerned with what constitutes reality. Researchers need to have a viewpoint regarding their understanding of how things work. An individual's understanding is based on the environment they live in; the students in our context are directly affected by their society, family, and college life. In turn, these important factors affect how those students view their world. Ontology refers to the things that exist in the physical, tangible world. It is concerned with human relationships and the ontological world they create (Burgess et al., 2006). Researchers need to demonstrate their position regarding how they see 'things' are and how those 'things' work.

The ontological position of interpretivism is relativism (Scotland, 2012). Relativism refers to the idea that reality is subjective, and it changes from one person to another (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). This paradigm depends on the subjective dimension when interpreting the world around us. In other words, we form reality when our consciousness engages with objects, resulting in giving them meaning. When engaging with students in the focus group, I relied on what I saw and heard and made my interpretation based on how I saw reality during my interactions with students in the group meetings. I also took into consideration the fact that the participants may have interpreted the same situation differently. This makes interpretive ontology a subjective entity since it is based on individual interpretations. Different people may construct meaning in different ways, which is why the interpretive paradigm accepts different opinions. Epistemology, on the other hand, is concerned with the nature and forms of knowledge (Cohen et al., 2007): how knowledge can be created, acquired and communicated; whether knowledge has to be discovered or constructed. These are all issues that relate to the ontological position.

My research is empirical. Even though empiricism accepts that there is an innate structure in our mind which consists of memory, sensations and imagination, it rejects any form of natural knowledge and insists that knowledge or beliefs are acquired through learning

(Carruthers and Macdonald, 1990). In other words, empiricism is based on observation or experience rather than pure theory.

### **3.3 Research Design**

The research design is the road map that researchers follow during their journey (Kumar, 2019). Research design has two primary functions. This research is an in-depth study of a group of students who are at-risk of withdrawing from their institution for various reasons. A case study design is used because I am looking at a small group of students who share similar characteristics such as culture, language, educational background and linguistic ability. The teachers involved in the focus groups are directly involved in dealing with these at-risk students and will, therefore, be considered as part of the case study.

A case study is one of many methods of studying social science. It seeks to find an answer to “what” and “how” questions relating to a particular situation. It is, therefore, paramount to define research questions as highlighted below in the case of my research.

**RQ1:** What are the main reasons for poor student engagement and retention in this context?

**RQ2:** How can faculty through their formal and informal interaction with students contribute to the retention and engagement of at-risk students?

Case studies can focus on an individual, a group, community, an instance, an event, a subgroup of the population, or even a city (Kumar, 2019). Algozzine and Hancock (2016) identify three types of case study research designs: i) exploratory, ii) explanatory, and iii) descriptive. The exploratory design seeks to define research questions for a subsequent study or to determine the feasibility of research procedures. The design also seeks to establish cause-and-effect relationships. In this case, the study investigates the reasons that cause students to leave the institution, as outlined in research question 1, including the impact of the teacher in influencing students’ decisions towards their institution, as highlighted in research question 2. The primary purpose of the explanatory case study, which applies to

this investigation, is to determine how events occur and which ones may influence particular outcomes. Finally, descriptive designs attempt to present a complete description of a phenomenon within their context. In a case study investigation, it is important to treat the total study population as one single case study (Kumar, 2019).

Case study is "an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, programme or system in a real-life context" (Simons, 2009, p.21). As a researcher, you select a group of people who you think are most suited to discuss what you want to explore, or the group can be the result of self-selection. You should identify the issue of discussion carefully and provide an opportunity for additional relevant themes to emerge. You need to negotiate with the participants the process of recording the debate. The details of the discussion(s) become the basis for the analysis of findings and conclusions.

Case studies have certain limitations and have, at times, been viewed as a less desirable form of research (Yin, 2000). They have been criticised for not having a clear methodology or structure. Gerring (2004) explains that methodologically speaking, researchers who use a case study approach struggle to articulate what they are doing. In general, the literature tends to indicate that it is also difficult to generalise from one single case to another. Flyvbjerg (2006) thinks this is a misunderstanding and states that a case study is useful for both the generating and testing of hypotheses. Despite the popularity of the case study as a research design, it lacks an organisational structure to guide the researcher. Stake (2005, p. 443) attempted to provide an answer to this issue by stating "case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied . . . by whatever methods we choose to study the case". We could, for example, study the case analytically or holistically, but we concentrate on the case. Case study can be seen as subjective, giving too much freedom for the researcher's interpretations, which can negatively affect the validity of the investigation. Another misunderstanding, according to Flyvbjerg (2006), is that the case study method is

most useful for generating hypotheses in the first stages of the research process, while hypothesis-testing and theory-building are best carried out by other methods later in the information gathering process. The fact that case studies have remained as a traditional method of researching social science, despite the criticism the model has received, is an indicator of both their popularity and effectiveness. The lack of having schemata or an organised frame and guidelines could be the secret of the model's success as an inquiry method.

Yin (2009) identifies some procedures for doing case study research (Figure 2), which have informed the development of my approach.



**Figure 2: Steps involved in conducting case study research (Yin, 2009)**

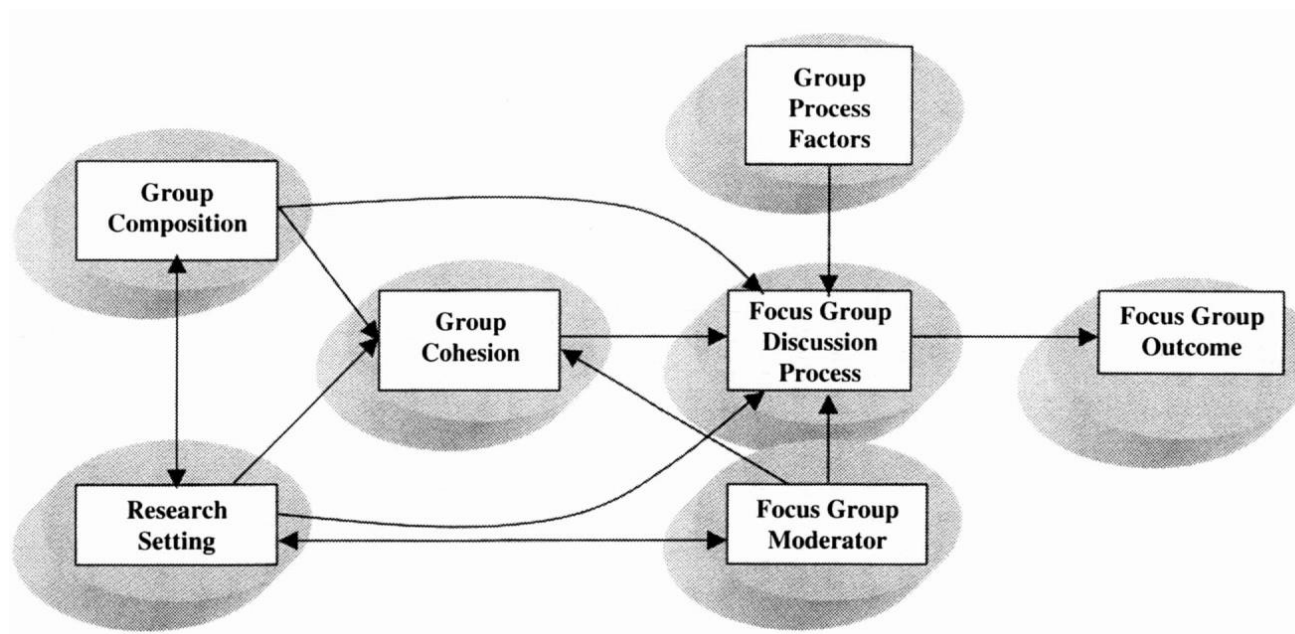
During the planning stage, a researcher needs to decide if the case study is the right design to answer the research questions, informed by the model's aforementioned strengths and

weaknesses. For example, case study research tends to focus on contemporary social phenomenon, such as the behaviour of college students in my context. It also tends to answer the “how” and “why” type of questions and hence my research questions: RQ 1: What are the main reasons for poor student engagement and retention in this context? (i.e. Why are students leaving?) and RQ2: How can faculty through their formal and informal interaction with students contribute to the retention and engagement of at-risk students? During the design stage, a researcher needs to observe four fundamental principles: i) construct validity, ii) internal validity, iii) external validity and iv) reliability (Yin, 2003). Preparing for case study research depends on the scope of the study; for example, does it involve single or multiple cases? The researcher needs to be a good listener, flexible, and above all, have a good grasp of the topic being researched. This is one of the main reasons for choosing a case study approach, as I am directly involved as part of my day to day work in dealing with the challenging issue of student retention. Collecting case study data can be achieved through different methods such as interviews, focus groups, observations, and archive records. Each of the methods requires different sets of skills. While conducting a focus group as a method, I initiated various focus groups in preparation for my research, as part of my day-to-day work, as well as a pilot case study in the early days of this investigation. Each information gathering method needs to observe specific procedures while collecting data to ensure quality control. Examples meeting this need include using multiple sources of evidence and forming a direct link between the questions being asked and the conclusions drawn. Analysing case study data consists of examining, categorising, tabulating and testing the evidence. Sharing case study data is the reporting stage of presenting the results and findings. Identifying the target audience and having drafts checked by another researcher are examples of the structure that can be followed. Sometimes case study data can be combined with other data at the reporting stage. An example of this combining is be outlined in Chapter 5, where it is explained that some existing quantitative data from the college records were used to validate the qualitative data findings.

### 3.4 Focus Group Research

Focus groups, as the primary data collection method of this inquiry, provide an ideal strategy for collecting data in qualitative research. Focus groups examine attitudes, opinions or perceptions towards an issue, product, service or programme through a free and open discussion between the group members and the investigator. A focus group entails a group of people who share some similar characteristics that the researcher identifies interacting as a group, sharing their views on a particular subject (Kitzinger, 2005).

As shown in Figure 3 below, Fern (2001) identified seven components of a focus group's conceptual framework: a) group composition, b) research setting, c) group cohesion, d) the focus group discussion process, e) group process factors, f) the focus group moderator and g) focus group outcome.



**Figure 3: The General Focus Group Process Framework (Fern, 2001. p. 11)**

Focus groups are facilitated by a moderator/researcher who raises issues or asks questions that stimulate discussion among members of the group. Due to its low cost, it is a suitable method of finding information in almost every professional area and academic field (Kumar,



2019). Most importantly, focus groups are central to the pedagogical interests of other applied fields such as a) counsellor education, b) nursing education, c) medical school education and d) business education. Focus groups are, therefore, an ideal method for collecting data from a group of students who are at risk of withdrawing from the institution for various reasons. However, focus groups have some drawbacks: participants who have personal, sensitive or critical issues to deal with may be very unwilling to raise them in public. In this case, the researcher could miss important areas of concern. For example, it is important to recognise the fact that participants may have low self-esteem by knowing that they are at risk. The researcher needs to be extremely careful when handling a situation involving failing students.

An audio recording of the meetings' conversations is as important for the efficient analysis of focus groups as it is for qualitative research in general (Kitzinger 2005). Such a recording was made with the participants' consent. Focus groups are harder to record than individual interviews, as I learnt through Focus Group 2 (FG2), because the participants are usually spread out in a room, and there are almost always some overlapping conversations.

Group composition affects the dynamics and outcome of group discussion in a focus group; once the session begins, the moderator cannot control this part. Group cohesion is a major contributor to the success of focus group projects (Fern, 2001). It gives a reason for the focus group member to engage in the discussion. The personal characteristics of the participants, the research settings, and the moderator all play a significant role in the group's cohesion. The research setting of the focus group can also affect coherence.

Research settings refer to the location where the study is carried out. Each setting provides a different atmosphere, which affects how the individuals behave and interact. Two environmental components exert a major influence on how students are likely to respond: a) the number of people at the location and b) how they are arranged in the room. Some need privacy, others may feel crowded, and others may feel comfortable in a large group.

Secondly, the physical aspects of the setting, such as the tables, chairs, and recording equipment. Focus group planning includes: a) selecting the students, b) sending them invitation emails, c) making sure to follow-up regarding their attendance confirmation, d) finding the right equipment for recording their interactions, e) booking a suitable venue where there is likely to be a minimal number of disruptions (Krueger, 2014). It is clear that a focus group researcher should choose the interaction setting very carefully (Algozzine and Hancock, 2016).

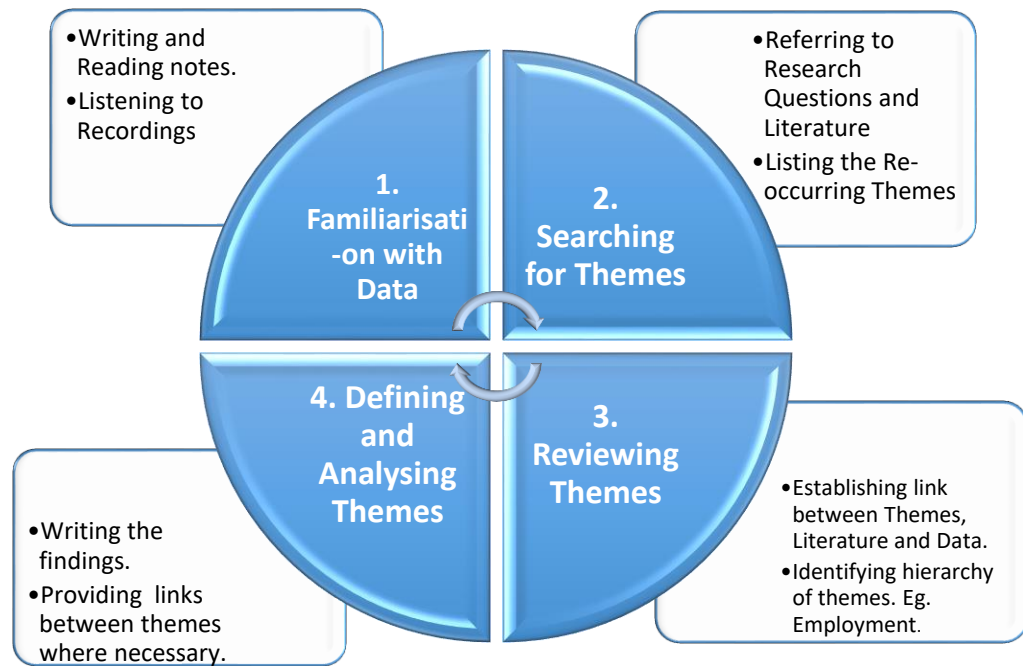
Focus group moderation is an active process that requires the researcher to be constantly alert. Some of the skills a facilitator must possess are how to deal with quietness during the interview and watching out for dynamics of the group and providing different prompts where necessary. The moderator plays a significant role in deciding if the setting is affecting the dynamics and discussion of the group. Being bilingual in this context is important for the moderator and/or researcher. Such a facility allows students to switch between English and Arabic, giving them the opportunity to express themselves freely in their mother tongue. Such an option is especially valuable to and appreciated by, the students with low levels of English. The moderator should be skilled in prompting questions and discussion topics according to the level of responses being given (Traynor, 2015).

Côté-Arsenault (2013) identified a range of advantages and disadvantages of focus groups. Focus groups, for example, are harder to arrange than individual interviews. Interviews are easier to set up, whereas a focus group of up to ten people requires a larger venue, and might require individual arrangements for participants such as transportation and checking their availability. Translation or transcription of the notes are also more challenging compared to individual interviews and may entail high costs, especially if a professional service is being used. In my context, this would be how my results of research apply to the other male institutions of this college system. The focus group researcher needs to prepare the list of topics to be discussed and other probing questions in case there is little participation. The

researcher may provide some questions for the participants before the meeting, so they are better prepared for a dynamic discussion. During this study, I took a semi-structured approach to developing the focus group questions and prompts (Appendix 5 and 6). In semi-structured interviews, the interviewer discusses a number of open-ended questions and frames them based on the interviewee's previous responses. The interviewer has a general idea about the direction of the interview, and what should come out of it, but does not enter the interview with rigid, predetermined questions (Hashemnezhad, 2015). Data from semi-structured interviews can be interesting and informative because the direction of discussion can be relatively unpredictable.

### **3.5 Thematic Analysis**

Thematic analysis is a process of categorising and linking data before presenting them (Grbitch, 2012). It can be used in a variety of research fields, not just case study, and is a suitable tool for analysing different types of data, such as focus groups and interviews (Clark and Braun, 2013). While analysing the data thematically I followed the process shown in Figure 4 below.



**Figure 4: Thematic Analysis Process (Source: Self-generated)**

The themes chosen reflect the areas of interest or concern raised by both teachers and students in the focus groups. The themes also resonate with the literature in the field and therefore, the final themes and sub-themes established are informed by the literature, the pilot study data and data from my study. The classification of the themes started as I was conducting the focus groups and was informed by the literature and the pilot study; during the familiarisation with the data and while listening to the recordings, transcribing and translating the content from Arabic into English, I began to identify the themes and sub-themes. I was also interested in the frequency of their occurrence. I sought to establish a clear link between the themes and the research questions, to ensure that the focus was on what causes students to leave and the part that faculty (teachers) can play in helping to retain at-risk students. The next stage was to review the themes according to their importance to the focus group participants and establish the links that exist between the themes, the literature and the data. Further verification of the discussion notes and recordings were necessary to ensure that I was not selectively listening to expected and desired themes as an insider researcher (see below, section 1.6.2). This was a necessary strategy to avoid bias as

I was familiar with both the students and their concerns in general. My main point of reference was the two research questions, with my aim being to address the focus of the research questions in an unbiased manner.

While I considered using coding software such as NVivo to identify the themes in the focus groups, I opted to code manually for various reasons: i) NVivo is more suited as a coding tool while using large amounts of data; ii) the student focus groups were conducted in Arabic and then translated into English which makes it difficult for software such as NVivo to identify common themes especially as students are not used to certain terminology such as ‘mentoring’ for example; iii) even though the teachers’ focus groups were conducted in English, not all teachers were native speakers and their levels of English varied which made their language use difficult to code using software; iv) translating the audio recording from Arabic into English entailed listening to the recordings multiple times, which helped identify the themes even when checking for any gaps in the written scripts; v) the focus group questions that are designed to find answers to my research questions also helped in narrowing down the theme which I managed to highlight using a colour coding scheme. Five main themes arose during this study and each theme had sub-themes which were informed by the literature as well as the pilot focus group. Table 2 below shows details of the themes.

**Table 2: Themes and Sub-themes**

	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>
1	Student Readiness and Preparedness	Academic Skills
		Military Service
		Transition Period
		Programme Demands
2	Pedagogy Employed in the Classroom	Language of Communication
		Effective Teaching Strategies

3	Access to Teachers Outside the Classroom	Access to the Teacher
		Student versus Teacher Expectations
4	Student-Teacher Relationships	Caring Teachers
		Formal Interaction
		Informal Interaction
5	Individual Factors	Employment and Family
		Special Needs

To conclude, this section has outlined the interpretive paradigm that has been utilised in this investigation, which suits my ontological and epistemological viewpoints about what knowledge is and how we acquire it. The qualitative approach that has been adopted in this investigation is suited to this paradigm, as has been highlighted in the literature. Case study as a research design fits with the research approach as well as the interpretivist paradigm. The section has also highlighted the reasons behind using focus groups as a method for data collection, which also goes hand in hand with both the paradigm and the research design that have been adopted. The section also touches on important ethical considerations that need to be adhered to while conducting case study research through a focus group. The final part dealt with a brief background of the components of thematic analysis, which will be detailed further in Chapter 6.

## 3.6 Methods

### 3.6.1 The Focus Groups

The data were collected through six focus groups conducted with first-year students at-risk of early withdrawal, and their teachers, as indicated in Table 3 below. There were various reasons that led me to choose the focus group method. During focus groups participants may feel more relaxed and reveal more about their opinions. Additionally, in focus groups, the

moderator can observe group dynamics and intervene where necessary. For example, if participants look tired, the moderator could provide them with a short break and invite them to have some refreshments. Focus groups are also time-saving and more economical, compared to other information gathering methods such as interviews; thereby allowing the researcher to collect a large amount of data at once and in a short time (Burgess et al., 2006). All focus groups lasted for around one hour each.

**Table 3: Overview of the Focus Groups**

<b>Focus group</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>	<b>Focus Group Details</b>	<b>Data Collection Date</b>
FG1 (Pilot)	7	In 2013, students of this focus group had to spend up to three years in the Foundation Programme. They were required to pass English and Maths before being allowed to join their major or register for any course other than Maths or English.	12/12/2013
FG 2	9	During this time the Foundation Programme became a one year programme, but students were allowed an additional semester after paying a small fee. Students had to pass English and/or Maths before joining their major.	09/08/2016
FG 3	4	This category of students is similar to FG2 in terms of the amount of time they could spend in Foundation. During this time, Maths was moved from Foundation to first year major. So, these students were required to study English only.	20/03/2019
FG 4	5	These are students who were allowed to join their major but need to pass pre-requisite Maths and pre-Physics courses before they are allowed to undertake other specialised courses linked to these such as Calculus and Physics. In addition to Maths and pre-	25/03/2019

		Physics, these students were allowed to register in some general studies courses.	
FG 5	4	This group consists of English teachers who teach foundation students of FG3. These teachers see their students for at least 12 hours a week, which gives them enough to advise their students.	21/03/2019
FG6	5	This group consists of English teachers who teach FG4 students and also other students who are already in their majors. Teachers have four contact hours for each of the courses they teach, and they are required to teach between four to five courses each semester.	20/03/2019

It is worth noting that this research focused only on first-year at-risk students, so students beyond the first year who are at-risk, due to their low GPA of less than 2.0, were not included in this investigation. This limitation was implemented in order to narrow the focus and produce an in-depth study of a specific group, as highlighted in the second research question.

After identifying the focus group participants, they were then sent a meeting invitation through email, with details of the time and venue of the meeting after individual confirmation that these arrangements suited their schedules. They were also informed in this message that refreshments would be provided. The first meeting that took place was with Focus Group 3 students, followed by Focus Group 4 the next day. The teachers' Focus Groups (5 and 6) took place the following week over two consecutive days. The natural setting for the focus groups in my context is the classroom, but I realised that there are sometimes disruptions around the areas of the classroom compared to a more quiet location. Access to the latter decreases distractions and offers greater comfort, so providing an environment that should encourage respondents to offer higher-quality information. The majority of the focus groups were therefore held in the main college meeting room, where participants felt they were able to contribute in a more relaxed and peaceful environment.



During the focus group meetings, I tried to ease the pressure on students and make them feel comfortable, and at ease, by providing refreshments in the meeting room. This gesture helped in making the discussions less formal, and as a result, individual contributions were spontaneous. Some participants were somewhat dominating, which probably intimidated the quieter students who were relatively passive. To address the issue, I directed specific questions to certain students, being careful not to make them feel embarrassed, which encouraged and enabled them to contribute. For example, I used statements such as “that is an interesting point (A), what do you think (B)”?

#### **3.6.1.1 Focus Group 1 (Pilot)**

The pilot discussion group served as a prototype for the procedures of the primary case study and provided information about the lessons learned, which then informed the research design and procedures (Yin, 2009). The pilot focus group also helped me to understand certain research-centric issues: i) the resources needed such as the recording equipment, ii) the setup in general and iii) the space to be used for data collection. In this study, the pilot focus group meeting took place in December 2013, and included seven at-risk first-year students who were registered for the foundation programme. The seven students needed to pass English and Maths before they could join their major. During the meeting, students were asked about what kept them motivated, engaged and connected to the institution. The meeting was audio recorded, which was very helpful during the data analysis stage, allowing me to easily listen to the recording several times and identify the themes as they appeared during the discussion. This pilot was insightful, as it provided an outline of what type of student should be considered for recruitment in the remaining focus groups. The pilot focus group also helped identify the themes that occurred in the subsequent focus groups and which were then used for the thematic analysis presented in Chapter 4. Below are some examples of the theme areas that emerged out of the pilot group discussion:

- Difficulties they faced during the transition period of the first four weeks of joining college.
- College attendance procedures and their impact on student retention.
- Student-teacher relationships and lack of support from management, especially in dealing with conflict cases.
- The effectiveness of the classroom teaching approaches.
- Scheduling of certain classes like Maths. For example, students seeing their Maths teacher only twice at the beginning and end of the week.

During the period of study of the pilot focus group, students could spend up to three years and a half in the Foundation Programme. In addition to Level 1 to 4 of English proficiency, there were two additional pre-Foundation courses at levels 1 and 2; the students had to spend one semester at each level. The exceptional progression rule was introduced to allow students who scored 90% and above in their final exam to skip the next level, e.g. moving from level 1 to 3 or level 2 to 4.

To conclude, the pilot focus group helped me identify the areas of research in many ways. First, it helped drop the hypothesis I had in thinking that student retention was limited to students' attributes such as motivation, as it identified that there are other influencing factors such the students' social and academic integration. It also helped me develop some new hypothesis such the importance of student-teacher relationships, which was the main focus of discussion that led me to choose a more focused research question (RQ2). In addition, the themes that emerged from the pilot study helped me to identify the themes in the subsequent focus groups. The pilot study also assisted me in testing the logistics of conducting focus groups such as: i) choice of venue, ii) the need for a relaxed environment, iii) the process of sampling and iv) appropriate recording equipment. There were areas that occurred in the pilot study which I did not explore further such as the students' social integration within campus, because students did not talk about the matter in depth. Also there was a wide

spectrum of topics that were important to some students, but not to others, such as participation in football tournaments.

### **3.6.1.2 Focus Group 2**

Following discussions with my supervisors at the end of year one of this study, it was decided that I should re-structure the focus group slightly so that the themes that had been raised during the pilot focus group were properly explored and thoroughly investigated.

During this time, students had to complete all their English and Maths requirements before they were allowed to register in any major courses. The same attendance rules applied for FG2 as for FG1 (pilot) above. The English courses were divided into levels 1 to 4, with 4 being the highest. Students spent one semester at each level and needed to achieve IELTS band 5 at the end of level 4 in order to progress to their major. In this model students could spend two years and a half just completing their foundation English. The exceptional progression rule also applied to this group. For Maths, students needed to pass Maths courses 1 and 2, which were also semester based; so the majority of students were registered in Maths as well as English. Students who failed to pass English and Maths after a year were given an additional last semester at no cost.

Focus Group 2 group was audio recorded to ensure transparency. As is the case with other focus groups, the meeting started with making sure that all students had signed the consent form followed by: i) a brief introduction to the topic, ii) an explanation of the aims of the research and iii) what the participants can expect. The participants were also allowed to address other topics that were relevant but might not have been covered during the main discussions; an option which provided more robust data. Watching the body language of the students during the interactions also helped me understand how passionate they were about some of their interactions. All the students were above 18 years of age, and their profiles are highlighted in Appendix 14.

### **3.6.1.3 Focus Group 3**

Focus Group 3 was limited to students who joined college whilst needing to spend time in the Foundation Programme to achieve the required English benchmarks. Those who were interested in participating took part in the focus group. Semi-structured interview questions were used during this focus group. The meeting was audio recorded, and students were very engaged and wanted to spend longer talking about the various topics relating to the focus group questions. I allowed them to have an informal chat while having coffee after declaring the meeting was completed and stopped the recording. Appendix 9 contains the Arabic transcript of this focus group and Appendix 10 the English translation.

FG 3 students need to complete the Foundation Programme over a maximum period of a year. A student who does not pass after completing the foundation can either join a vocational certificate programme or pay for an additional semester and attempt to pass the English. Students who score 85% and above in English are allowed to sit an exceptional progression exam, which allows them to skip a level if they pass it. So a student who scores 85% in level 1 English is allowed to do the level 2 final exam; and if he gains 60% he will be able to move to level 3. These students are at-risk because they did not meet the English requirement upon arriving at college. These students are only allowed to miss 15% of a course, with or without justification. They are automatically withdrawn from their course if they exceed the 15%. Only in very extenuating circumstance such as hospitalisation, military service engagements or a death in the family, might a college council decide to grant the affected student an additional 5%. These students are taught by a teacher similar to those of Focus Group 5. Appendix 15 highlights the profiles of FG 3 participants.

### **3.6.1.4 Focus Group 4**

Focus Group 4 consisted of first-year students in their programme disciplines, but who needed at least one pre-requisite course as a result of not meeting the required standards upon leaving high school. The courses are mainly Mathematics, and in some cases, a course

called pre-Physics. These students are therefore restricted to registering in general studies courses as well as Maths and pre-Physics in their first semester. This restriction is only lifted after they pass the pre-requisite courses. Focus Group 3's questions were also used with this group, as shown in Appendix 5.

These students are at risk because they failed to meet the maths requirement upon arriving at college, but they have all met the English requirement. Some students who opt for engineering as a major are also required to complete a pre-Physics course. This group of students is allowed to register in some general studies courses while completing their pre-requisite foundation Maths and pre-Physics. The same attendance rules apply as in FG3. These students are taught by teachers similar to those in FG6. Appendix 16 highlights the participants' profiles.

#### **3.6.1.5 Focus Group 5**

Focus Group 5 was limited to English teachers from the Foundation Programme. Four teachers who expressed interest from the 11 foundation teachers took part. The foundation team is known for being very motivated and dedicated to their work and the success of their students. The focus group, which lasted for 1 hour, was audio recorded. The interview used semi-structured questions, as shown in Appendix 6. Profiles of this focus group's participants are provided in Appendix 17. The transcript of this focus group is provided in Appendix 11.

#### **3.6.1.6 Focus Group 6**

The final focus group consisted of five out of the eight teachers who showed an interest and which provided a good representation of the various programme disciplines that are offered in the college. Participants of this focus group have been directly involved with teaching students who fall under the category of Focus Group 4; students who have passed English but need to complete the Maths and/or the pre-Physics requirements while being allowed to enroll in some other general studies courses. Appendix 18 highlights the participants'

profiles. The focus group 5 questions were also used with this group, as shown in Appendix 6.

## **3.7 Ethical Procedures**

### **3.7.1 Ethical Considerations**

All research, especially when it involves people who are in less powerful positions than the researcher, needs to be undertaken ethically. This provision is safeguarded by requiring researchers to seek ethical approval, based on established good practice and ethical guidelines such as those provided by BERA which ensure that: a) responsibility towards participants has been adhered to, b) respect for participants is demonstrated through their voluntary informed consent, privacy and disclosure, and c) participants' cultural sensitivities are taken into consideration. Macfarlane (2010) states that these guidelines inform novice researchers of what they must not do, as well as providing them with advice about how to ensure that ethical requirements are met.

In my case study I sought ethical approval from my institution, as well as The Open University in the UK, to conduct focus groups with both students and teachers within my work context. The clearance was secured both from the research site, from where the focus groups were chosen and then activated, as well as The Open University (Appendix 1). My research has been informed by our institution's fundamental research principles, the central one being that participation is voluntary. Informed consent gives each participant a guarantee that they are fully informed about the procedures and risks involved in research and have given their consent to be involved. Researchers must not endanger participants by placing them in a situation that can cause them harm as a result of their participation. Harm does not necessarily have to be physical; it could be psychological, perhaps as a result of stress. Another principle is to guarantee the participants' confidentiality by assuring them that their

information will not be revealed during the research process or reported to people who are not directly involved in the study.

My initial plan was also to include individual interviews with the focus group participants as part of the data collection, in order to allow them the opportunity to express themselves more freely in a one-to-one setting. However, after careful consideration I decided not to pursue this path for two reasons: i) there could be some ethical issues related to the capacity of undertaking the individual interviews, especially as I felt that some students did not differentiate between my role as a researcher and their supervisor, and ii) while applying for The Open University's ethical clearance, the issue of the lone researcher was raised.

While the study, as well as the researcher, has adhered to these clear ethical standards, these have been reinforced by engaging in The Open University's ethical consent process. The researcher is obliged to ensure all students have clear information about their rights, all have consented to participate, and are all informed that their information will be used in ways that are transparent to them. The participants' information also needs to include their right to withdraw at any stage before, during or even after the research. There is not a single set of rules that can anticipate every ethical circumstance, and thus institutional procedures are designed to scrutinise the research process and ensure that the researcher fully understands, and will adhere to, all relevant ethical issues while planning and implementing his or her research.

Researching in this part of the world (the Middle East) has its challenges. For instance, while this institution welcomes and encourages appropriate applied research involving our faculty, staff and students, there are procedures and guidelines which are different from those commonly known in Western countries. For instance, although not written in the research guidelines, it is not permissible to mention the name of the country, which is why it is referred to as a country in the Middle East. Like other institutions around the world, a researcher in this context must have prior approval from his/her establishment's Applied

Research Committee as well as the participants. The gathering of data without an approved research application is not permitted. As per the research guidelines, research in this context must adhere to the following regulations (reference omitted to preserve the anonymity of the institution):

- All components of the proposed research must ensure that local cultural sensitivities are maintained.
- All proposed research must be consistent with the goals, philosophies, and policies of the institution.
- Studies that are derogatory and prejudicial, or undermine, or attempt to undermine the integrity of any person or institution, will not be permitted.
- Final manuscripts stemming from the research are to be provided to the organisation.

The power relationship between the researcher and the participants is another element that affects decisions on whether to use a qualitative or quantitative approach. Qualitative research aims to understand the situation being studied from the participants' perspective and not the investigator's. In a case study, the researcher needs to spend a considerable amount of time with the people being researched to obtain rich data. This requirement also means establishing a rapport with the participants to ensure that the data are both offered and reliable. However, spending excessive time with the participants can result in asymmetrical power relations. Power in research depends on the ontology, epistemology and methodologies that a researcher adopts (Florczak, 2016). If a researcher believes that one reality exists and that having power over the research process, including the subjects held at a distance, will contribute to credible findings, then she or he should conduct studies using a quantitative methodology. On the other hand, if a researcher holds that there are many realities and the way to understand these realities is through dialogue with the participants,



as well as giving them the power to tell their stories, then he or she should carry out studies using qualitative methods.

As narratives are created through conversation, a researcher's relationship with a participant has implications for what is said, or not said, in an interview; or in this case, a focus group (Haddow, 2018). Similarly, "the speaker's intent is always met with the analyst's interpretation" (Salmon and Reissman, 2008, p. 200), and thus, any prejudices the researcher may have will be reflected in their interaction with participants and their analysis of the data to create a degree of 'researcher bias'. I recognise that both teachers and students may view me as someone who has 'power over them' (Haddow, 2018) – that is as either a line manager or as a person who is directly involved in their evaluation. This kind of hierarchy is quite strong in this cultural context where respect for the authority of the line manager by teachers and the status of the head of department by students can affect participants' choice in taking part in the research. In order to mitigate this as much as possible, I followed the procedures set out by The Open University's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) guidelines. For examples, all participants were made aware that participation was voluntary as set out in the PIS forms (Appendix 3 - 4) and the consent forms (Appendix 7 -8). Participants were also informed about their right to withdraw from this study at any time, i.e. before, during or after the investigation as highlighted in the PIS and consent forms. Participating students were informed that choosing to either take part or not take part in the study would have no impact on their grades and assessment as shown in the PIS forms (Appendices 3 - 4). The teachers were equally informed that taking part in the study or not, would have no impact on their evaluation and progression at work as outlined in the consent forms (Appendices 7 - 8). Participants were also reminded at the beginning of each focus group about their right to leave the focus group discussions at any time and their right to ask for their information to be withdrawn (see example shown in interview transcripts, Appendix 10).

The 'insider-outsider dilemma' relates to the location of a researcher as a participant (insider) or an observer (outsider) or, most commonly, somewhere on a continuum between these two poles as 'participant observer' (Bourke, 2014; Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). When plotting one's own position on this spectrum, Atkinson and Hammersley (1994) posit that four factors must be taken into account: i) which individuals are aware that you are a researcher, ii) how much knowledge those in the research setting have about your project, iii) which activities you engage in, and iv) how completely you adopt the orientation of participant or observer.

An 'insider' according to Griffith (1998, p. 361) is "someone whose biography (gender, race, class, and so on) gives her/him a lived familiarity with the group being researched" while the outsider is "a researcher who does not have any intimate knowledge of the group being researched, prior to entry into the group". It is paramount to recognise the importance of separating the subject and the object in a case study, since this issue is a characteristic of all social inquiry; yet the point is relatively neglected in discussions on case studies (Thomas, 2011). The outsider-insider concept in educational research has two opposing views. The insider view sees that an external researcher can never understand the situation being investigated because s/he has not had experience of the case being investigated. Hockey (1993, p. 200) suggested that being an insider "may potentially influence the whole research process". Griffith (1998, p. 362) claims that an insider produces "a different knowledge". In general, insider researchers have easy access to the data, and they spend less time collating it compared to outsider researchers. Hawkins (1990) suggests that insiders who do their research while performing their daily duties within the institution will have a larger effect on the outcome of research than outsiders. For example, insiders who are more familiar with the context under investigation will have a better initial understanding of the social setting, the context and how situations and events are linked. This knowledge gives that insider researcher the opportunity to portray a more accurate picture of what is being examined.

Mercer (2007) suggests that this is because insider researchers often enjoy free access, better rapport, and deeper, easier access to data, as well as possessing a better understanding to interpret that data. Insider researchers are often able to engage research participants more quickly and use their collective experiences to gather richer data (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). Hockey (1993, p. 204) maintains that insiders are able "to blend into situations, making them less likely to alter the research setting".

The outsider view, on the other hand, challenges the ability of the insider to present an unbiased report of the situation. Insiders may not be able to separate their personal experiences from those of participants (Kanuha, 2000). The fact that insiders are more familiar with the context could lead to assuming their perspective is far more widespread than it is (Brekhus, 1998). They might not notice the obvious or ask the questions that they think should be asked (Hockey, 1993). It could also be argued that participants may not share certain information with an insider for various reasons, such as fear of being judged or being perceived as negative or 'unhelpful' (Shah, 2004). If you are an insider researcher, your power is greater than when you are an outsider; therefore, as an insider, you have to be much more aware of power issues. Participants might also be more willing to share their concerns with a detached outsider who is not bound with or conditioned by the life of the institution (Dimmock and Walker, 2005).

There is also a third small group of researchers who think that it does not matter whether you are an insider or an outsider while conducting research. Many of the researchers who conducted studies within their settings did not perceive any difference between their research and the outsider researchers (Anderson and Jones, 2000). I have found that the advantages of insider research outweigh the challenges, because it is almost impossible for an outsider to understand entirely the context being investigated. It is far more efficient and time-saving when a researcher is part of the community under investigation. The principle of having a bird's eye view is in line with my understanding and therefore it would be ideal if all research

was conducted by an insider, but then checked by an outsider to ensure that the researcher has not adopted pre-conceived conclusions about the topic being researched. One way of checking the validity of focus group research in social science is to involve both insider and outsider researchers with the same participants, and the same conditions. In theory, the results should be similar. However, it was not possible to implement this idea in this current study, but drawing on institutional data contributed to verifying the findings.

It is hard to remain objective while conducting qualitative research (Mills, 2011). Given my position as a programme supervisor of the students under investigation, there is the risk of personal bias being present when conducting this study. To some degree, I could anticipate what students would say, which could appear like finding answers to validate my current practice in order to maintain the status quo. To tackle this issue, Mills (2011) suggests that researchers develop a list of propositions about what they think they will find through the course of the investigation. These proposals provide a window into the belief system and personal bias that can creep into an inquiry. I have put Mill's suggestions into practice by listing what I think are the anticipated results based on my knowledge and understanding of the college's working environment. This knowledge is acquired through my observations and interaction with students over the 19 years I have been in the same job. I strove to maintain an emotional distance as these types of friendly and honest interactions often come from students being open about sharing private issues. As pointed out above, during any research that involves people, the researcher must adhere to explicit legal and ethical requirements.

Although these formal requirements were met, I was careful about ensuring that the students and colleagues participated voluntarily, giving their informed consent and constantly reaffirming to them that their participation could be withdrawn if they so wished, without any harm or repercussions to their well-being. The relations between researcher and participants need to be continually negotiated in practice, at different times of the research

process (Brooks et al., 2014). To be specific, my role is as a member of the teaching staff, and as a line manager for many of the staff, so I was acutely aware of the potential power imbalance between myself and the participants. The fact that only 5 out of the 11 teachers who report to me showed interest is an indicator that my power over position did not have an impact on participants as far as their involvement was concerned. Despite my attempts to reduce the implications of the power dilemma in my research, the 'shadow' of the power relationship still existed. My participants are colleagues who might report to me or students who know that I am in a management position, and little can be done about that fact. One can also argue that as the head of the department, the person who in the students' eyes could pass or fail them and the person they cannot say 'no' to, they may feel obliged to accept my invitation to participate in this research. To reduce these tensions, I made sure that voluntary consent was highlighted in all documents such as the participants' information sheet (Appendix 3; 4) and the consent form (Appendix 7; 8). I also reminded all participants before, during and after the focus groups that they could withdraw at any time. I also refrained from approaching students individually by making a general announcement in assembly or class instead. Despite my power position, students have always regarded me as a 'big brother', as is evident in the close rapport I have built up with them over the years. This special relationship, in my view, sometimes breaks the barriers of power and also provides students with an existing relationship of trust. One student from Focus Group 2, who had already signed a consent form, decided to withdraw when I repeated that participation was voluntary and students can withdraw at any time at the beginning of the meeting. This gesture demonstrated that my pre-existing relationship with students improved rather than diminished my ability to be trusted, thereby enabling students to participate voluntarily and openly. Students were very passionate about the topic being discussed and enjoyed being part of a team that shared the same burdens, especially in the absence of such a platform within the college network.

Steps were taken in order to mitigate the dilemma of being ‘all three’: the researcher, the transcriber and the translator. For example, random samples from the focus group data were taken and checked by a qualified translator to both ensure that the translation was accurate and to promote the rigour and validity of the research. Secondly, certain terminology proved a challenge such as translating the term ‘mentoring’ which does not exist in the Arabic language. All student participants used the Arabic term for ‘academic advising’ (الإرشاد الأكاديمي) to mean ‘mentoring’ (see section 2.5 above). As a result, I had to make the decision of translating this correctly into ‘mentoring’.

There are also complex ethical issues related to what Cook et al. (2013, p.140) refer to as “naming, shaming and framing”. Naming any group or community is a political process that can inadvertently maintain patterns of marginalisation and exclusion. Unfortunately, in the context under investigation, the term “at-risk” is still largely used. Nevertheless, during the focus group meetings, I avoided as far as possible labelling students being “at-risk” by referring to them as “first-year students who fell short of meeting certain benchmarks that are necessary to access their major”.

### **3.7.2 Ethical Clearance Procedures**

All participating students and teachers were aged over 18 and gave their informed consent. They were given detailed information about the nature of the research and what it would entail. This process was implemented through the participants’ information sheets, which briefed the participants about the research (see Appendices 3 and 4).

The first step in seeking ethical clearance from my institution was to send an email message to the Foundation Division’s Executive Dean. The next step was to seek approval from the college director, which was done via email. The final step was to complete an ethical approval form, which was then reviewed and approved by the institution's research committee. The research theme was also a desired area of investigation for the college because, in May 2015, the issue of retaining students became one of the key performance

indicators (KPI) of the organisation; a development which occurred halfway through this investigation. The name of the country where the research was conducted had to remain anonymous, and so the wording “a Middle Eastern country” was recommended by the research committee. In addition to personal data, the form included details such as the project summary and its significance. Other key components of the form were a) research design, b) the ethical protection of participants and c) data confidentiality through anonymity.

After acquiring the clearance to carry out research involving the institution, the next step was to complete the ethical clearance process required by The Open University. After reading and completing the ethical clearance documents and regulations required by The Open University’s Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC), and the British Education Research Association (BERA), as well as the new General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), all the forms were sent to The Open University’s HREC and clearance was given. The following appendices highlight the documents that were submitted or received as part of this process.

- Appendix 1: OU Ethical Clearance
- Appendix 2: HREC Ethics Form
- Appendix 3: Participants’ Information Sheet (PIS)– Students
- Appendix 4: Participants’ Information Sheet (PIS) – Teachers
- Appendix 5: Focus Group Questions – Students
- Appendix 6: Focus Group Questions – Teachers
- Appendix 7: Consent Form – Students
- Appendix 8: Consent Form – Teachers

The next step involved approaching potential participants to create the focus groups for both students and teachers. For Focus Group 2, an announcement was made during a weekly

assembly inviting students who wished to take part in the research to get in touch with me. Those interested in taking part were randomly selected.

With the student Focus Groups 3 and 4, I visited classes and informed students about the research, and asked those who were interested in participating to inform me via email or approach me directly. Four students took part in Focus Group 3 (FG3) and five students in Focus Group 4 (FG4). I used Arabic during the announcement to ensure that students with low levels of English understood the message. They were informed that participation was entirely voluntary and that their names would remain anonymous throughout the research. Pseudonyms were used for all participants during this study, as shown in Appendices 14 - 18. Participants were also reminded, at the beginning of each focus group, that their real names would not be shared (see Appendix 10). The Participants' Information Sheets (see Appendices 3 and 4) also highlight that pseudonyms would be used during this study. Some students informed me on the spot that they were willing to take part, and others approached me afterwards. Students were randomly selected from two categories of students: those who were in the Foundation Programme, FG3, and those who were in their major but needed to pass a non-credit prerequisite course such as Fundamental Maths or pre-Physics course, FG4. All the students were first-year students. A suitable meeting time was set, and at the beginning of the meeting, the PIS form was read to them in Arabic. Both students' focus groups were conducted in Arabic with Focus Group 4 students using a mixture of both English and Arabic, which made them feel more comfortable to talk in certain areas or about certain issues. The fact that I had to translate and transcribe the students' focus groups, as well as transcribe the teachers' input, meant making myself more familiar with the data; an increment which also helped me to identify themes more easily. Even though I am a qualified translator, in order to ensure appropriacy and correctness, a sample translation was checked by another translator.



For Focus Group 5, an email message was sent to all 11 English teachers inviting them to take part, and four were able to do so. Participants were also informed that if they were interested, more information would be provided in the form of a participant's information sheet (PIS) and they were sent the form by email.

The same process was followed with the programme teachers of Focus Group 6. With this group the initial invitation message was sent to 13 teachers from the various programmes that are offered in the college. Eight expressed an interest in participating and five were chosen to ensure representation from the range of departments. A meeting time that suited all was set. At the beginning of the meeting, participants were also given the PIS form to review again and ask any questions. They were also given the participants' consent form and were reminded that they could still withdraw from the research before the focus group began or withdraw their information after it had taken place. The main points of the PIS form were also covered orally, just in case some participants had not read it before the meeting. After the focus groups were conducted, participants were thanked for their contribution and reminded that they could still withdraw. Both teachers' focus groups were conducted in English, as this is the only common medium amongst them. I also informed all participants, students and teachers, that I would be happy to share the research findings with them.

## Chapter 4 – Data Analysis

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis of the data collected; the critique and discussion are undertaken in Chapter 5. This research investigates and identifies the factors that are contributing to student attrition in my college and ways in which academic staff can contribute to those students' retention and success.

Each utterance for the focus groups was colour-coded according to the themes and sub-themes presented here. Samples of these colour-coded focus group transcripts are provided in appendices 9, 10 and 11. In Appendix 10 (p. 236) for example, the text highlighted in mid-blue refers to 'Caring Teachers' as shown in Table 4 below. In addition, some of the participants' statements are highlighted in more than one colour, indicating that they refer to different sub-themes. For example, in Appendix 11 Zainab's (FG5) statement is coded in dark blue, mid-blue and pink, reflecting that I could code for a number of different sub-themes within this one utterance. In this case, Zainab's thoughts are relevant to the sub-themes 'Informal Interaction', 'Caring Teachers' and 'Student vs Teacher Expectations' (see Table 4 below). The data have been analysed into five main themes, addressing each of the two research questions: Theme 1: Student Readiness and Preparedness; Theme 2: Pedagogy Employed in the Classroom; Theme 3: Access to the Teacher outside the Classroom; Theme 4: Student-Teacher Relationships; and Theme 5: Individual Factors. Each theme has sub-themes, as shown in Table 4 below. The sub-themes are linked to their themes also through the colour coding: for example, the first theme 'Student Readiness and Preparedness' is colour coded blue and the sub-themes lying under this theme are therefore coded in different shades of blue. The same pattern applies to the all the remaining themes and sub-themes. The choice of colour for each main theme was random. The third column in Table 4 below

provides a link between the themes and sub-themes highlighted by the data and the important stages and aspects of the student journey espoused by the conceptual model (Figure 6) discussed in Chapter 5, section 5.7. Table 5 summarises the participants of each focus group for ease of reference.

**Table 4: Themes and Sub-themes with Colour Coding**

	Themes	Sub-themes	Link to Conceptual Model and Student Journey
1	<b>Student Readiness and Preparedness</b>	Academic Skills	Pre-Entry Transition Period
		Military Service	Pre-Entry
		Transition Period	Pre-Entry Transition Period
		Programme Demands	Pre-Entry Transition Period Formal Relationships
2	<b>Pedagogy Employed in the Classroom</b>	Language of Communication	Pre-Entry Transition Period Formal Relationships
		Effective Teaching Strategies	Transition Period Formal Relationships
3	<b>Access to the Teacher Outside the Classroom</b>	Access to the Teacher	Transition Period Formal Relationships Informal Relationships
		Student vs Teacher Expectations	Formal Relationships Informal Relationships
4	<b>Student-Teacher Relationships</b>	Caring Teachers	Transition Period Formal Relationships Informal Relationships
		Formal Interaction	Transition Period Formal Relationships
		Informal Interaction	Transition Period

			Informal Relationships
5	Individual Factors	Employment and Family	Pre-Entry Transition Period Formal Relationships Informal Relationships
		Special Needs	Pre-Entry Transition Period Formal Relationships Informal Relationships

**Table 5: Focus Group Summary**

FG1 (Pilot)	FG2	FG3	FG4	FG5	FG6
Students - Foundation At-Risk English	Students - Foundation At-Risk English and/or Maths	Students - Foundation At-Risk English	Students First Year At-Risk Maths and Pre-Physics	Teachers of FG3	Teachers of FG4

**Key: FG = Focus Group**

## 4.2 Theme 1: Student Readiness and Preparedness

The literature has stated that this is an important theme because it is common to find students who meet the necessary skills required for admission and yet are not prepared in other ways to succeed in higher education (Sparkman et al., 2012). It is also worth noting that there is a scarcity of research focused on student retention and related data collection and analysis relating to higher education institutions in the Middle East and the Gulf-Arab region in particular; a deficit which makes the data of this investigation especially valuable (Hagahmed, 2014). The importance of this theme has also been strengthened by the fact that

it has emerged from the data and it addresses issues related to: a) academic skills; b) military service; c) transition period, and d) programme demands.

#### **4.2.1 Academic Skills**

Underprepared students face obstacles which require them to gain the necessary skills to facilitate success (Al Shehri, 2012). A large proportion of these students are referred to as ‘high-risk’ students because they are not only academically underprepared, but other factors make them even less likely to persist in higher education (Malik, 2011). Examples of these factors, as is the case in the context of this study, could include insufficient English to allow students to learn when English language is the medium of instruction (Tabari, 2014). The literature has also revealed that not all students who meet the English requirements are ‘prepared’ as many lack one or more of the basic skills necessary for success in higher education. These are sometimes called ‘high cognitive skills’ (Crowe et al., 2008), and include critical thinking and problem-solving. The need for these skills has also emerged in the focus group discussions of both teachers and students in the data presented here.

Alan, FG5, expressed the issue of ‘lack of study skills’ which should be addressed during academic advising sessions:

How do they (students) improve the study skills that are required? I think that there needs to be more attention paid to that. A lot of our students don't take notes in the classroom, for example, and they've never been taught to or encouraged to ... They don't go home and revise. Revision isn't a concept that they know and it's these kinds of study skills that I think we need to also attach to the advising. (*Alan, FG5*)

Paul suggested that during the transition time, the college should set up a start- and an end-point as far as study skills are concerned about showing students where they are at and what skills they should have after a given time.

We have got students who have come out of very different educational environments and I feel that part of our job was to try and transition them to a point where they are taking more agency for their learning, where they are taking

more responsibility and part of that having the paper on, having the grades and the numbers is to show them, okay look, this is, this is where you are, and this is how you can work towards where you need to be. (*Paul, FG5*)

An interesting finding which demonstrates students' need for informal interaction is their lack of the study skills that would allow them to acquire information by themselves; hence, the constant need for access to their teachers:

They tend to approach their teacher informally to inquire about formal issues. They do not have the skills to search for information; this is due to the oral and aural aspects of this cultural context. (*Aziz, FG6*)

I agree I think like sometimes the students need some advice and they cannot just put it in an email or put it in writing because they are not sure this can be set in writing, and sometimes they don't know how to put it in writing. (*Adel, FG6*)

The majority of students in this study are at risk for not meeting the English language requirement prior to entry to college, such as those in Focus Groups 2 and 3. However, there is another category of students, those in Focus Group 4, who have met the English requirement and sometimes exceed in this area, but they have shortfalls in other areas such as Maths and Pre-Physics. Such students are therefore required to take prerequisite courses. Weakness in individual subjects is sometimes caused by the type of school a student went to. For example, Abubaker went to an English medium private school which did not focus on the subjects such as Maths and Physics, which are needed in our college:

I think this applies to me. I studied in a British curriculum in high school. I only studied business and English. I did not have Maths. I didn't have Physics or Biology, only Business. When I entered university they gave me a SAT exam in Maths and to be honest I didn't know anything about Maths. Maybe I'm grade eight or nine. Whatever comes after, I have no idea. And because of the Maths course, I am studying now, Maths, I am progressing well. (*Abubakar, FG4*)

Salem also flagged the issue of the different language medium between school and college as another reason for students ending up struggling in certain subjects:

Students who graduate from government schools had their main studies in Arabic. When they enter college, everything is in English. Previously there was nothing in English, and everything was in Arabic. So many students who enter college now suffer as a result of language and would, therefore, face difficulties in their studies (*Salem, FG4*)

Adel (FG6) suggested that these low-level students need special attention, especially during academic advising, where they could benefit from having special advisors who do not have a heavy teaching load:

Different students need different type of advising ... at-risk students need more follow-up they need more of regular meetings ... the number of advisees assigned now for each one of us is almost fixed number I guess around 40 ... the higher risk students are usually assigned to the supervisors and programme coordinators in our department. (*Adel, FG6*)

#### **4.2.2 Military Service**

Although military service itself has not been addressed in the literature as a possible cause for student attrition, this is a sub-theme that has emerged from the data and which can fall under the multitude of reasons that are highlighted in the literature as affecting student success. Other reasons include: i) illness, ii) family problems, iii) employment demands, iv) poor attendance and v) low motivation (Sullivan and Nielsen, 2013).

Military service, which is newly introduced in this country but common in the region, can have a negative impact on the retention and success of male students in the following ways: a) a gap between school and higher education as a result of military service has a negative impact on students' English language proficiency, which contributes to early withdrawal; b) students are liable to be recalled to the military for refresher courses and to serve. Such interruptions can cause study-related problems, mainly if they occur at particular critical times in the course and, as such, these issues can contribute to academic failure or withdrawal. The introduction of military service in September 2015 in this country and other countries in the region, with particular reference to its negative ramifications, has yet to be

investigated; hence there is a gap in the literature regarding this contemporary development. Male high school graduates who would have joined this institution in 2016 had to do a one-year military service before they were allowed to access higher education. Since September 2018, this 12 month military service has been increased to 18 months. Perhaps surprisingly, when these students join the college after completing their military service, they usually have good study habits and are motivated. When asked about the effect of the military service on their motivation and discipline in the classroom, students from FG 3 agreed the experience had positive results:

I agree. That is one good thing about military service. (*Zayed, FG3*)

Yes, we learn respect so that everyone respects everybody. (*Sultan, FG3*)

You build your personality. (*Zayed, FG3*)

However, students returning from military service tend to be academically disadvantaged, in part because their military service is focused on physical training with little academic exposure:

It means during the military service we forgot our family and how can we not forget English. (*Sultan, FG3*)

An increased number of these military service students, who already had lower English proficiency, struggle to make the required progress within the allocated foundation year. Students from Focus Group 3 also expressed concerns about how the military service gap year affected their academic ability:

Even the military service affected us; spending a whole year without learning changed our standards a lot because you are studying for all these years and then you stop learning for a whole year. You are cut off from learning, and you don't get a connection with anything called English, everything is in Arabic. (*Zayed, FG3*)

When FG 3 participants were asked about whether having a few English classes each day while in the military would alleviate some of their academic issues, only one student, Sultan,



thought it was a good idea; the rest said that there was ‘no time’ in the day for English classes:

I don't think it would have been a good idea. If they put us in the classroom, everyone will be asleep because we are so tired. You wake up at 3 in the morning, and then you go to sleep at 9. You sleep for five hours a day. (*Zayed, FG3*)

After completing their military service, at some stage students will be required to attend a two-week refresher course back with the military; an obligation that often coincides with term time. There is no liaison between the army and the ministry of education to resolve these matters.

### **4.2.3 Transition Period**

This theme has been informed by the literature which found that many students experience difficulties with the transition into the first year of higher education; during this year, the attrition rate is at its highest (Wintre and Yaffe, 2000). Harvey et al. (2006) also emphasised that the first year is a crucial part of the long process of cultural, social and academic integration into higher education.

Academic progress is directly linked to retention, as students who do not make the required progress are likely to leave or receive academic dismissal. Although the Foundation Programme is meant to be a transitional period from school to college, a considerable number of students come ill-prepared for life at college, regarding both what it offers and what it demands, as highlighted by Khalid and Omar from FG 2:

I wanted to join the police, but my father said go to the college first and if you don't like then join the police. When I came here, I liked it, so I decided to stay. (*Khalid, FG2*)

The school is all about routine, but here it is different, you learn to take responsibility for your own learning. (*Omar, FG2*)

FG3 participants spoke about their negative school experience, as stated by Mubarak:

At school, the teacher doesn't help struggling students and only focuses on the smart ones who get even better, and the weak ones are left behind. (*Mubarak, FG3*)

After spending up to a month in the institution, other students found out that: a) their preferred major is not offered or b) they did not even know they had to go through a remedial programme. Faisal, FG2, who missed the orientation programme stated:

During the first week, I was lost. (*Faisal, FG2*)

Abdulaziz was an evening student who also missed the orientation, which usually happens in the morning:

I was an evening student and the orientation happened in the morning, I was not sure about the programmes offered. (*Abdulaziz, FG2*)

Talal, (FG3) and Abubakar, (FG4) also expressed concerns about getting access to administrative support during their first few days. All such feedback indicates the transition period needs to be given special attention by the college management, as will be explained in the discussion chapter. Other critical points made included:

There was a big crowd in the Academic Services area, and some students needed to get a password to access their schedule and were marked absent while trying to get it. (*Talal, FG3*)

Abubakar expressed his frustration about his transition to college by suggesting that this research study should include problems students face with Academic Services:

I suggest that this research should include issues of academic services. I wasted three weeks ... they said registration was closed .... I discovered that people in Academic Services are ... not trained in their job, with due respect. This is not right. I wasted my time going back and forth, luckily I met you, and you really helped me resolve this issue. (*Abubakar, FG4*)

Hamad gave a useful suggestion to solve some of the difficulties faced by freshmen:

College should send a video link to students on how to check their schedule or log in with username and password so as to avoid queueing for long periods. (Hamad, FG3)

The most essential thing about advising is the first two weeks. I was lost. I didn't know how many courses I need, number of credits ... . (Salem, FG4)

Abubakar, FG4, spoke in detail about his unfortunate experience during the transition period:

I am probably the last student to register this semester. I registered on the last day, even after extension week .... after three weeks of coming every single day here. Nothing happened. I came from morning until afternoon. I sat at Academic Services, and they themselves don't know anything. I missed a whole semester because of this issue. I nearly missed the opportunity to enter college. (Abubakar, FG4)

Unlike most of the FG3 students, FG4 participants suggested dedicating more time to help new students, some of whom face multiple problems during their early days when joining the college, as highlighted in Salem's bad experience below:

I entered college in the first week and registered everything with academic services, and they told me that you could find your advisor's details online, but when I went online I did not find my advisor's details, so I went back to them. I waited for many hours, then I approached one of the academic service employees, and she said next week you would have an advisor. ... I went to them, and they sent me to C-block. I didn't know where C-block was. I asked my colleagues where C-block was, and I found the programme supervisor. Academic Services advised me to see my teacher. When I saw my teacher, I told him that I do not have an advisor. He said that this has nothing to do with me. You need to go to Academic Services. (Salem, FG4)

Salem, FG4, also expressed the frustration of dealing with Academic Services by adding:

This happened with all of us. I went back multiple times, and there were only a few days to finish academic advising; also, an advisor should check on students once a month to see how they are doing. (Salem, FG4)

Teachers in FG5 and FG6 also indicated that the one-to-one sessions are beneficial for students, especially during the foundation year, which is regarded as a transition period between school and higher education:

Foundation is a transitional stage between what these students have experienced in high school to what's expected from them once they get into the college..... so we've got students who've come out of very different educational environments, and I feel that part of our job was to try and transition them to a point where they're taking more agency for their learning, where they're taking more responsibility . (*Paul, FG5*)

FG4 participants also had some different concerns about academic advising during their first few weeks such as: a) the advisor's lack of awareness about the advising procedures, and b) gaps in the system regarding who, if anyone, should help train academic advisors: supervisors or Academic Services? The students were also critical about the time wasted in trying to locate, communicate and get access to their advisors:

The most important thing about advising is the first two weeks. I was lost, I didn't know how many courses I needed, number of credits.... (*Salem, FG4*)

I have an advisor, and I have everything. But the problem with my advisor, everything is okay about him, but he doesn't know how to choose the course schedule. When you ask him a question like "do I need pre-Physics?", he tells me "I don't know, I am new.." (*Tarek, FG4*)

Tarek gave some valuable advice on how to resolve issues related to advising by saying:

If you want a solution to this problem ... get all the advisors, and the students in one big hall and the advisor sees his advisees one by one. (*Tarek, FG4*)

All focus groups addressed the issue of early intervention, especially during the first few weeks of joining college, where the risk of attrition is at its highest. Students and teachers alike emphasised the importance of helping students during their transition period from school to higher education. FG4 students were particularly critical of their academic advising experience, as well as: i) the lack of adequate support at all levels, ii) teachers who are their

advisors, iii) academic services and iv) programme managers. This negative experience indicates that the current system is not working well and needs reviewing. Adel and Mark (FG6) suggested that academic advising should be about more than just choosing subjects but helping students to make the right decision after giving them various choices such as the choice of their major.

#### **4.2.4 Programme Demands**

This theme emerged from the literature raising concerns that retention as a phenomenon was often explained through a combination of ‘negative’ attributes and a failure on the part of students; but not as a failure on the part of the institution. However, institutions are also responsible for influencing students' decisions to persist in their studies or to leave (Habley et al., 2012).

The student focus groups raised a number of academically related concerns that affect their engagement and success and which could lead to attrition. These concerns are mainly in the following sub-themes: a) attendance policy; b) length of the programme; and c) scheduling.

##### **4.2.4.1 Attendance**

During the period of this study, the institution introduced some changes to the student attendance policy. Up to the academic year 2014/2015, the maximum amount of unexplained absences allowed was 10% of the course. However, students were granted a further 10% of explained absences, which had to be justified by attested documents, such as sick leave for not less than three days. Starting from the academic year 2016/2017, the maximum absence was increased to 15%, regardless of whether the student had justification or not. Any student who exceeded 15% in a course is withdrawn from that course but can repeat it the following cycle or semester. If a student arrives up to ten minutes after the class has started, he is marked late. Every three ‘lates’ are converted to one absence. Students and their guardians receive a text message on their mobile phones when 10% and 15% have been reached. The

students, teachers and department administrators also receive email messages when these warnings are dispatched. The college's attendance policy is a factor that is causing some students to disengage from the institution because they know that reaching 15% absence could mean withdrawal/dismissal from the course. For first-year students, this could mean withdrawal from the institution since they are only enrolled in one or two courses, English and Maths.

Most Focus Group 2 students were in agreement that the college attendance policy is very harsh and does not take into consideration their circumstances. Faisal, for instance, said:

Our biggest issue is attendance. (*Faisal, FG2*)

Abdulaziz commented about the issue of using sick leave documents which are used to justify absences:

Also if a student is sick on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, the doctors only give a one-day sick leave because Friday and Saturday are weekend days and they do not give medical certificates for weekend days. You (college) only accept a three days sick leave, but doctors are given instruction to only give one day or two and anything above that, the medical certificates need to come from a hospital. Some hospitals charge you a lot of money for a medical report. (*Abdulaziz, FG2*)

According to the college attendance procedures, a student is given excused absences if they provide a three days sick leave certificate from a recognised medical centre. These centres only issue sick leaves for days that fall on a working day so a student who is sick on a Wednesday, Thursday and Friday only gets a sick leave for the first two days but not Friday, which is the first day of the weekend. Students like Omar and Abdulaziz argued that this rule is not fair. The college, on the other hand, argues that a student who reaches 15% absenteeism in a given course has not attended enough classes to master the learning outcomes of that course. College management also argued that it is trying to prepare students for the workplace by promoting work ethics, such as good attendance and punctuality, which are essential characteristics required by employers.

The issue of attendance was raised by students in Focus Group 3, who expressed their discontent when their teachers mark them late. Some participants, such as Zayed expect teachers to be lenient with attendance:

The teacher needs to be lenient about attendance. (*Zayed, FG3*)

Mubarak also spoke about a colleague who left college due to attendance:

A student had a valid reason for missing classes, and every time he told the teacher that he has excuses at 1%, then he decided to leave knowing that he would get dismissed sooner or later when he reaches 15%. (*Mubarak, FG3*)

#### **4.2.4.2 Length of Programme**

There is very little research that deals with the effects of programme length on student engagement, especially in the Middle East. In the context being investigated, programme length has been identified as a real demotivating factor for students. Up to August 2015, students could spend up to three years to complete the Foundation Programme, with another four in their major, before they can graduate with a bachelor's degree. Saif, from Focus Group 2, who met the Foundation exit requirements stated:

Foundation, in general, is too long. I went and acquired IELTS from outside and returned to college, and I have now completed the English requirements. (*Saif, FG2*)

Fortunately, this issue was addressed primarily through the radical structural changes the institution implemented during the academic year 2016/2017, making the Foundation Programme a one-year programme. When asked about their preference for shorter or longer Foundations' period, most FG2 participants who struggle to make academic progress, such as Hassan, prefer a more extended Foundation rather than the quicker option for the Foundation Programme:

I also prefer a longer period. (*Hassan, FG2*)

There was also a minority group of students such as Abdulaziz, FG2, who preferred to have a longer foundation period in order to accommodate other commitments such as work:

The problem is that there are some students who are very weak and having one year in foundation is not enough; they need longer time. In my view, two years is better. (*Abdulaziz, FG2*)

While preferring the longer foundation option, Abdulaziz also suggested that students should be allowed to skip a level if they excel academically:

I recommend a more extended foundation period, but students who excel in their assessment should be allowed to skip a level, like students who get 80% or 90%. (*Abdulaziz, FG2*)

Despite the programme's structural changes which led to 'foundation' becoming a one year programme at the maximum, some students expressed some degree of demotivation because they felt the Foundation Programme is still too long:

I haven't enjoyed Foundation because it is an intense programme, even when other students are on holidays we are still here studying. (*Mahmoud, FG2*)

Because he (the student) feels like he has a long path ahead of him and instead of wasting his time in a place that he does not understand, he seeks other opportunities like going to the army or getting a job somewhere. (*Zayed, FG3*)

This means that he could do a lot in the four years that he is spending at college. (*Sultan, FG3*)

He (the student) could get a salary and start a life and build his future. (*Zayed, FG3*)

#### **4.2.4.3 Scheduling**

Student participants raised the issue of course scheduling and how that issue can affect their retention and success. Although it is related to attendance, the way certain courses are scheduled can also mean withdrawal from certain courses for some students, especially if most of the classes are scheduled on one day or two for a given course. Mahmoud, FG2, highlighted this issue by stating:



If you have 4 of the weekly eight periods of a course in one day and you are absent that day, your percentage automatically becomes high. (*Mahmoud, FG2*)

Employed students are at a greater risk of being withdrawn for attendance reasons, compared to unemployed students, due to the formers' work commitments. Focus group students commented on the issue faced by these employed students:

The timetables, especially for students who work. If the timetables are not right, students will not stay. (*Sultan, FG3*)

They should help us with fixing our schedule like university X next door where they allow students to choose a subject at a time that suits them. In this college, the schedule is done by academic service. (*Mahmoud, FG2*)

While scheduling most classes of a given course such as Maths in one day can cause an attendance issue as explained above, some students felt that having one class of Maths a day is not enough and prefer two instead so they can maximize their benefit and remain connected to the subject matter:

The failure rate in Maths 1 and 2 is high. I suggest giving two hours of Maths a day instead of one. Because the failure rate is high, students would benefit from having additional hours, and now we have one hour a day, I suggest having two hours, one for the teacher to explain the lesson and the second one to practice using the Alex software. At the moment, the teacher barely has the time to explain the lesson, so when can we do the practice? (*Abdulaziz, FG2*)

Some FG2 participants commented on the long hours they have to spend at college every day:

The issue is having to spend long hours at the college, and we are here from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm every day. (*Abdulaziz, FG2*)

I am in college from 8:00 to 4:00 every day, and I only have one hour break. We did not have any opportunity to do anything when we get back home, and we are too tired. (*Omar, FG2*)

Scheduling of the advising periods was also raised by focus group participants for various reasons, such as students and advisor timetable conflicts, where a teacher is available and a student is not, or vice versa:

Perhaps the timing and schedule of advisor do not allow him to see certain students. You are a morning student, but your advisor has afternoon shifts.  
(*Tarek, FG4*)

But all the time when she (advisor) is free, I have classes. This is wrong. She should send emails to students and say: "I am free this time", and that will allow students to know when to go to see her to sort things out. (*Salem, FG4*)

Those who cannot match their schedules with their advisors they can choose a different one. (*Talal, FG4*)

Scheduling academic advising later in the day was deemed ineffective for some students like Abdulaziz, who felt that students are too tired at that time and prefers to have these sessions in the morning instead:

The most important thing is that we don't have academic advising late. When you have a late afternoon class, you are tired and bored. They should give you advising in the first class. (*Sultan, FG3*)

For example, if we have three sessions on Tuesday from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm, we suggest cancelling the 12:00 to 1:00 class and dedicate it to academic advising. (*Mubarak, FG3*)

Some Focus Group 3 participants were concerned that all their classes start at eight o'clock in the morning where there is heavy traffic that can cause tardiness for classes and hence affects their attendance. Mubarak gave examples of his own difficulties of starting classes early:

Teachers expect us to start at 8:00 o'clock, regardless of our situation. Everyone in society starts at eight. School starts at eight, the military starts at eight, everyone starts work at eight. (*Mubarak, FG3*)

Everyone is suffering in the morning. I leave my house at 6:00 am, way before class time. Because if I leave half an hour later, I get stuck in traffic. Only on

Mondays, I leave at 8:30 and arrive at college 20 minutes later”. (*Mubarak, FG3*)

The students' schedules consist of 50 minutes periods, followed by a 10 minutes break, spread throughout the day. Sometimes students have a single period and other times they have double periods with the same teacher. Some participants spoke about how some teachers opt to join the two periods without giving them the 10 minutes break and how that affects their concentration and prevents them from socialising with their colleagues if there is no break:

He used to join two periods which makes you bored with learning and you don't want to study, and your brain goes elsewhere. The teacher was hard on us from the first week. (*Mubarak, FG3*)

He pushes the students and gives a break later. No. We want to be like other classes and have our break at regular time. (*Zayed, FG3*)

During the 10-minute break, you want to see your mates from other classes. This makes you hate a teacher more. (*Sultan, FG3*)

To sum up, this theme has shown that student readiness and preparedness for higher education is a problematic issue in this context. The fact that students do not acquire the necessary study skills needed in any higher education context is, by default, an obstacle that hinders success. The data also reveal that compulsory military service before entering higher education has a largely negative effect on students' learning and success. Students forget what they learnt at school while engaging in non-academic activities for periods of 18 months or more. Focus group students also criticised the lack of a smooth transition to college life and gave examples of some issues of concern, such as course registration procedures and gaps in the academic advising process. Students also expressed major concerns about the college attendance policy, which does not take into consideration their personal circumstances. The fact that students are withdrawn from courses if they reach a certain absence percentage is equal to failing and hence has a similar effect on their retention. Students demanded more leniency from teachers, but the teachers said they are simply

applying the rules and regulations of the college. The length of the remedial programme, even after it was reduced to one year, also came out from the focus groups as a factor that affected their motivation. The possibility of spending up to three and a half years in Foundation for FG2 students was disheartening, and the same applied to FG3 students who have to spend a whole year studying only English. Students also called for a better scheduling system of classes and advising sessions that takes into consideration their learning preferences. Flexible class scheduling for employed students and better distribution of classes, such as Maths, during the week are a few examples of their demands.

### **4.3 Theme 2: Pedagogy Employed in the Classroom**

This theme was supported by the literature through a study that was conducted in a four-year college in Yemen which investigated the attrition factors among English as a second language (ESL) students (Bafatoom, 2010). The study focused on the impact of the curriculum, the teacher, assessment and the students themselves on student attrition. The investigation determined that factors related to student assessment were hugely influential on increasing student attrition, while teacher-related factors had the least impact. The study also found that weaknesses in all of the four studied variables could negatively influence students' persistence. This theme addresses the effect of the language of communication in the classroom and students and teachers' views about the effective teaching strategies that promote academic success and retention.

#### **4.3.1 Language of Communication**

Language, as a medium of communication in the classroom, has emerged as an important theme both in the literature and research data. Lane (2011) found that many students in the Gulf-Arab region lack the English language proficiency necessary to succeed in institutions offering high-quality education. Focus group participants also expressed the challenges and opportunities associated with English as the language of instruction.

Students in Focus Groups 3 and 4 did not have a strong opinion as to whether their English teacher should be an Arabic speaker or not. Surprisingly, FG3 who have low levels of English prefer their teacher to speak in English, but this group prefers academic advising to be done in Arabic.

It is better if the teacher talks only in English. It does not matter whether the teacher speaks Arabic or not. (*Mubarak, FG3*)

For some students, yes. They will benefit. For some who don't know English, yeah, it is better in Arabic. (*Tarek, FG4*)

When asked if they had a strong feeling about being taught in Arabic or English, some students expressed the difficulty of switching from an Arabic to an English medium of instruction. However, it must be recognised that although the college is renowned as being an English medium institution, this is not made clear to potential students during their application process, as expressed by Muath:

I was not ready, and I just came with the intention to stay until I get a job. I did not know that I had to study everything in English. (*Muath, FG2*)

Focus Group 3 students prefer to have academic advising done in Arabic due to their low level of English understanding. Sultan commented:

I think in Arabic it is better, so you can understand better because now in the Foundation, you don't know a lot of English. If the advisor uses difficult words that you don't understand, you might miss the point. (*Sultan, FG3*)

FG4 students were in agreement that having academic advising delivered in Arabic or English made no difference; they are happy with either language. Although it is unrelated to the topic that was discussed, Tarek prefers to have an advisor who was a national of his country and stated:

If he was a national of this country, he might take care of you more by saying that this is my compatriot, I mean he would motivate me. (*Tarek, FG4*)

The remaining students in FG4 did not think that having a national advisor mattered:

For me, it is normal. It does not have to be a national (from this country). (*Talal, FG4*)

It does not matter for me, either. (*Tarek, FG4*)

It is interesting to point out that FG3 students, who preferred their formal academic advising done in Arabic, would rather have the informal interactions done in English, as will be explained later.

Teachers in FG5 all agree that it is better if academic advising is done in Arabic, especially for low-level students:

Lower level students might benefit more from an explanation in Arabic, but we're in the process of developing their language skills, I think academic advising in level two helps them as well. We've got to understand these terms. We've got to see it as a process. (*Alan, FG5*)

Teachers of FG5 who do not speak Arabic think that language is not an issue, but culture is for some native English speaking teachers:

I think language can be a barrier. The biggest barrier is culture. And I think it is expectations. I think you are talking about new faculty and people coming that haven't had the experience. It's a steep learning curve when you come here if you haven't had the experience of teaching Arabic students ... You've got to learn very quickly ... (*Alan, FG5*)

#### **4.3.2 Effective Teaching Strategies**

This theme has been informed by the literature which urged the need for teachers to demonstrate transparency in their approach to teaching through clear instructions and learning outcomes that help students to understand the lesson expectations and comprehend the subject matter (BrckaLorenz et al., 2012). Examples of these transparent teaching approaches that were mentioned in the literature, and which have a direct impact on students' success, are: a) cooperative learning (Al Allaq, 2016); b) didactic or passive

teaching approaches (Crosling et al., 2009) the use of instructional technology. A number of topics emerged out of this sub-theme from the research data which are also similar to what has emerged in the literature: 1) caring teachers who treat all students equally; 2) organised and structured; 3) uses a variety of teaching strategies such as flexibility, 4) consistency; 5) adaptability; and 6) connecting learning to real life.

Central to the topic of formal interaction between student and teacher is the notion of a good teacher. The focus group participants were asked to explain what constitutes a good teacher. Some of the characteristics of a good teacher that were raised by the student participants included: a) caring about their students, b) treating all students equally and c) being lenient about attendance. This care element also occurred in a number of themes such as theme 5: Student and Teacher Relationships:

The good teacher is the one who cares about students. Should not focus only on one student. Cares about us all. (*Mubarak, FG3*)

Mubarak and Sultan (FG3) were critical of a teacher who only helps the struggling students and forgets about the more able ones:

The good teacher forgets the clever students without realising that the clever students don't know everything. (*Mubarak, FG3*)

I wouldn't be interested in the class (if the teacher only helps the clever students) and I would start missing classes. Absences could lead to leaving college. My absences would increase, and I would get dismissed from college. (*Sultan, FG3*)

Sultan, Mubarak and Zayed also spoke about a good teacher treating them like friends and understanding their circumstances:

A good teacher becomes a friend with all students and also takes into consideration students' circumstances. If a student comes late to class, he should find out why the student is late. (*Sultan, FG3*)

He makes you understand and becomes like a friend. (*Mubarak, FG3*)

If a student is sick, he gives him the advice to leave and go home. He also needs to be lenient and is available anytime for a student. (*Zayed, FG3*)

In terms of classroom pedagogy, Mubarak (FG3) identified some characteristics of a good teacher by stating:

The teacher explains the lesson in a simple way and avoids getting sidetracked. For example, if he explains the multiplication table, he should explain to me how to get the results and avoid telling me the story of the multiplication table and how it was invented as this does not benefit me in any way. (*Mubarak, FG3*)

Rashid agreed with Zayed Mubarak about the teacher making learning simple and relevant to the exams:

The same as what my colleague said. He (the teacher) should simplify this and help you understand and not give us too much work. (*Rashid, FG3*)

The nice thing is not to have a routine, and the teacher should not give us questions which do not come in the exams. (*Zayed, FG3*)

Asking teachers what constitute a good teacher was a hard question to start with, as it made them reflect on themselves.

Students should answer this who is a good teacher (*Aziz, FG6*)

Zainab, (FG5) gave examples of what characterises a good teacher, such as connecting teaching to real-life situations:

The teacher connects the lesson to real-life.... Like I was giving an example about football, and I was teaching them revision schedule yesterday, but I included things about football because all of them, they live, breathe, eat football. (*Zainab, FG5*)

Patricia, (FG5), also values making connections between the teaching and students' real-life experiences:



Making those connections between the topic and the students' experience as well as [those of] the teacher.... they ended up talking about some kind of festival. (*Patricia, FG5*)

Alan, (FG5) spoke about adaptability as a characteristic of a good teacher:

You have got to be able to wear many different hats as throughout your lesson you have to change, you have to be able to adapt to a different type of student, a different kind of cohort, different group ... You've got to be very flexible because things can just change. You can't stick to a rigid plan or structure because it doesn't always work. (*Alan, FG5*)

Aziz, FG6, summed up most of the important characteristics of a good teacher by stating:

A teacher who is good in the eyes of the students motivates them. He puts great communication between students and the teacher.... and also respects his students. Knows a bit about some of their background... theoretically, in lectures is good if it link them to practice because students are tired just listening all the time to theoretical things.... A good teacher is one who is organised or finds the ways how theory can be put in practice or in our field; it is about hands-on work. (*Aziz, F6*)

For Ziad, Adaptability was an important feature of a good teacher:

I think teaching skills, the teaching should be adaptive because teaching one class is different from teaching another class. For example, teaching women is different from teaching men; you have to adapt your approach and see the response you need to get the students engaged (*Ziad, FG6*)

Clarity and consistency was an important element of good teaching for Paul:

I think clarity is critical and ... I also think to an extent; you need to be consistent in that students should be able to know what you expect of them, and how to complete the task that you give them. There shouldn't be any big surprises for the students. They should be confident in knowing what they're, what you expect of them, and how to complete the task that you give them. (*Paul, FG5*)

FG6 participants also identified similar important characteristics of a good teacher, such as knowledge of the subject matter and the ability to deliver that knowledge to students:

A good teacher, in my point of view, is not only the person who knows information or the subject but also who can deliver. He has the skill to deliver it to the students in very interesting ways and is able to grasp their attention all or most of the time. (*Adel, FG6*)

I think ... before you're going to the class knowing precisely what you want to deliver what is the outcome of this class to plan in your head when you come in you are able to tell the students what are the outcomes of the lesson. (*Mark, FG6*)

Being organised and able to manage a class has also been identified as an important element in formal interaction within the classroom:

A good teacher is one who is organised or finds the ways theory can be put in practice or in our field; it is about hands-on work ... so you should be in certain ways innovative and make students be more engaged. (*Aziz, FG6*)

Adel, FG6, made some interesting remarks about some effective classroom management strategies, such as avoiding reprimanding students in front of their peers. This behaviour was an issue that was raised by Mubarak, FG3, who felt that some of his teachers treated him with disrespect.

In my case I like I know the students' names, they like that you call them by their names so try to memorize this in the first week. For new students I asked them to write their first name only and put them on a piece of ... then by the first week, I know all the names. (*Adel, FG6*)

Mark talked about taking into consideration students' learning styles and helping students create a mental image as effective teaching strategies, by stating:

We give them (students) situations where they can create a mental image and being mindful of the different learning styles that students may have known. Some students are more visual and other students are good with hands so to keep your courses dynamic using the different methods and to cater for the all the different levels because if the student feels that they are not keeping the pace that may lead them to leave. (*Mark, FG6*)

Focus groups participants, students and teachers alike, spoke about how the secondary schools' rote learning negatively affected the students' progress compared to a more interactive and student-centered approach at college that gives them control over their learning. Some FG3 participants gave an account of their school experiences:

The teacher would walk-in class and doesn't remember what he taught you and what he didn't, and tells you at the end of the month "I'll get my salary", and doesn't focus on the students. (*Mubarak, FG3*)

The teacher, during our school days, did not pay attention or care about students. ((*Rashid, FG3*))

All he did was write on the board, wipe the board and repeat that. They don't care if students understand or don't understand. Completely careless. (*Mubarak, FG3*)

Mubarak also gave a suggestion on how to make the lessons more interactive:

Teachers should walk around the class and check who has completed the work and who hasn't, and ask why students haven't completed the work. Maybe the students who haven't completed the work don't understand, and if they don't understand, why not? (*Mubarak, FG3*)

Talal also spoke about how the teaching approach in his previous establishment had negatively affected his progress and how a different approach of one of his current teachers did the opposite by having a positive impact on his studies:

I took Physics and the teacher, with all my due respect to the teacher, he used to explain but never made sure that we understood. I had no option but to get a private tutor or use YouTube and the internet, and ended up having little time to study for the other subjects. As a result, I hated this subject, and I never liked Physics. A different caring teacher here changed my mentality completely. I changed and honestly, I was getting the first grade in each exam. *Talal (FG4)*

Tarek, FG4, spoke about group work as a method to make the lessons more dynamic:

It's important, the group work is important. If someone knows and someone doesn't, maybe he can teach him and maybe better than the teacher. (*Tarek, FG4*)

Sultan, FG3, also highlighted group work as an important element of interactive learning:

Yes. For example, the teacher would arrange the table so that we are sitting in groups. (*Sultan, FG3*)

Salem, FG4, spoke how his current teacher's approach had changed his mind-set about learning 'Business' as a subject:

Now I study business. I only have good news about my studies. The teacher now thank god, I am always first second or third. He makes you like the subject, and he makes you think and search for things. If you love the subject, obviously you want to stay in college. (*Salem, FG4*)

Alan, FG5, spoke about a different teaching approach to make the learning more interactive, such as the use of technology in the classroom:

You need so many different approaches to get the students to learn to get them engaged. Some will respond to paper and pencil more than they will use the computer. Some embrace the technologies. Some fear technology. If you're not prepared to adapt in that situation, and you enforce only one way, one style, you'll lose certain students. (*Alan, FG5*)

To conclude, this theme addressed two main areas that are related to classroom pedagogy. Focus group participants had some interesting views about the language of communication within and outside the classroom. Focus Group 3 students, who are still at the language acquisition stages, prefer their teachers to speak to them only in English while they are in formal settings such as classroom teaching and academic advising. Their FG 5 teachers agreed that English should be the medium of communication in the classroom but recognised the effect of using some Arabic mainly to build rapport. They were in favour of having academic advising delivered in Arabic as some students do not have the English language competency to understand the content of the advising sessions. However, FG3 students

preferred to have all their informal interactions done in English so they could learn more in English in a more relaxed setting. FG4 and their FG6 teachers did not have a strong opinion about the language of communication. Their preference was English for all student-teacher interactions, since FG4 students are more competent in English compared to FG3 students. Focus group participants spoke at length about what constitutes good teaching and effective teaching strategies. A caring and fair teacher was at the heart of the discussions. Simplifying learning and avoiding routine were amongst students' recommendations for good teaching. Participating teachers gave various examples of good classroom strategies. Topics that emerged strongly were: i) adapting learning to meet students' needs, ii) linking learning to real life and iii) employing different approaches to facilitate learning such as using technology and avoiding rote learning.

#### **4.4 Theme 3: Access to Teachers outside the Classroom**

Interactions with teachers that happen outside the classroom have been flagged in the literature as having the most positive impact on students' success Pascarella (1980). This theme has also emerged strongly in the focus groups of both students and teachers in the data presented here. Two sub-themes were clearly noted from the data: 1) access to the teacher; and 2) student versus teacher expectations.

##### **4.4.1 Access to the Teacher**

The more often students have out-of-classroom interactions with their teachers, the better the quality of the relationship and the more connected they became with their institution (Bernstein-Yamashiro and Noam, 2013; Roorda et al., 2011). Students and teachers expressed concerns about getting access to each other outside the classroom. For students the issues that were raised ranged from: a) difficulty reaching their teachers and advisors; b) not knowing their supervisors; c) having enough access to advisors who are not well-

trained; d) advisor/advisee ratio. Teachers raised issues such as heavy workload and students not turning up for their scheduled meetings.

Access to academic advisors was not flagged as an issue by FG3 students because they have their teachers as advisors who are with them for at least 12 hours a week. This level of contact guarantees them regular access, bearing in mind that Foundation teachers tend to advise students daily during their English classes. However, FG4 students have teachers as advisors who, in most cases, do not teach them. In rare cases, when their teacher is also their advisor, they only see them for four hours per week in their capacity as subject teachers. Zainab, (FG5), who teaches students from FG3, explained some of the benefits of students having regular access to advisors:

I think since we function on cycles, we do academic advising quite regularly, I think up to two or three times across seven weeks. That is a very active engagement. (*Zainab, FG5*)

Students of Focus Group 4 were particularly critical about getting access to their academic advisors. Some students were critical about the fact that they are yet to meet with their academic advisors:

Till now, I have not seen my advisor... I don't know what to do so I need help. (*Saud, FG4*)

Same thing (for me). I haven't met my advisor. I registered for the whole course and subjects by myself. (*Abubakar, FG4*)

I have never seen my advisor, and I don't even know her name. (*Salem, FG4*)

FG4 participants also commented on the advisor-advisee ratio, stating that it is too high and that the advisors' workloads are also too high. Talal recognised that teachers could be under pressure due to their other academic commitments but Abubakar, who was also sympathetic towards the advisors, expressed concerns that the advisor workload is affecting everyone, especially the students:

One of the reasons the instructor cannot do what he needs to do, whether informal or formal, because of the work they have to do. (*Talal, FG4*)

Provide more advisors because of student load. The number of advisors is way too low compared to the number of students. (*Abubaker, FG4*)

Teachers like Ziad, FG6, expressed concerns about students not turning up for appointments which waste their valuable time:

Most of the time, students don't show up when we give them appointments. We schedule meetings, advising meeting, maybe after sending so many reminders you get 50% of them that's probably an achievement. (*Ziad, FG6*)

Teachers gave their views about the issues they face while trying to give access to their students.

FG6 teachers expressed their concerns about the impact of their workload on conducting effective academic advising. Trying to fit around and accommodate 40 advisees, as well as teaching 20 hours a week, was not manageable:

You have so many courses to teach you really cannot focus on advising because while you have six courses, you need to do the assessment for all of them (*Aziz, FG6*)

To tackle this issue, Aziz suggested decreasing the teaching load in order to teach and interact better with students and conduct research about how to better help students:

We need to decrease the load for sure. I mean to decrease the number of courses you are teaching, that will improve not just advising, but it will also improve teaching and interaction with students (*Aziz, FG6*)

#### **4.4.2 Student versus Teacher Expectations**

Denzine and Pulos (2000) argued that teacher approachability is an important quality that needs to be promoted to facilitate positive teacher-student interactions. While there were some similarities between student and teacher expectations regarding their interaction with

each other, this research data also revealed that there were disparities between their expectations.

Focus Group 4 students expressed concerns about having access to advisers who are unable to help them because they are not familiar with the procedures, suggesting that training should be provided for such advisors. Both Talal and Tarek, FG4, spoke about the importance of train the advisors:

He should be trained. (*Talal, FG, 4*)

We need training for advisors. (*Tarek, FG4*)

I have an advisor, and I have everything. But the problem with my advisor, everything is okay about him, but he doesn't know how to choose the course schedule. He only knows how to do the plan, but when you ask him a question like "I need pre-Physics", he tells you "I don't know, I am new". (*Tarek, FG4*)

Students in Focus Group 4 also felt that the advisors should check on them at least once a month, though email as this interaction motivates them and keeps them on track:

The advisor should check each month about our progress and anything we need. For example, he can notify us by saying "could we meet, I noticed that your marks went down" or "I want to know how you are doing with your course". (*Talal, FG4*)

Tarek gave an idea for dealing with the issue of access by suggesting having advisors who are dedicated to advising only, as explained the formal relationship theme:

And there is another thing, why they don't have the advisor for advising only because, in other universities, an advisor is just an advisor, just for students. (*Tarek, FG4*)

Teachers expressed some concerns about students' expectations and relying on the teachers as the only source of their success:

A lot of our students really do expect to be spoon-fed. There is a certain attitude that it's the teacher's responsibility to make sure I pass and if I failed somehow, the teacher hasn't done the job. And I think that's an attitude that's quite common amongst our students. (*Paul FG5*)



Mark, FG6, made an interesting suggestion of having selected advising done by different stakeholders such as the teacher, the counsellor and academic services. In his view, a teacher should be advising students about the course and its content as it is their area of expertise. A counsellor could advise students on their personal and motivational issues, and academic services do what teachers are doing now, which is advising students on which courses to choose according to the matrix. Adel, FG4, also made similar remarks about selective advising that targets individual students' needs:

I think we should divide the (advising) roles like... a counsellor who can advise on some of those softer issues ... I'm not advising you on anything in the course I'm advising you on the programme and the programme structure is something that is run by academic services (*Mark, FG6*)

I think advising is very important for the university and different students need a different type of advising ... at-risk students need more follow-up they need more of regular meetings. (*Adel, FG 6*)

Some teaching participants also stated how some students expect access to teachers wherever and whenever they meet them:

Sometimes it counts against you at least in their view. They will probably grab you informally somewhere, and they pass some message such as adding or dropping a course. Then later on when they come across problems, they said oh remember I met you at the cafeteria I told you. I have about 200 students I'm not going to remember everybody's request informally in the cafeteria or the car park. (*Ziad, FG6*)

Mark, FG6, explained how some students expect the impossible from their teachers, such as having access whenever and wherever they want it:

I think the challenge depends on what the informal communication is concerning because the students have one teacher but the teacher has fifty students, so when they come to us, and they ask us specific question about their course, we need to go and look at the transcript, they expect us to know their individual cases at the top of our head, so that is the limitation of the informal interaction. (*Mark, FG6*)

The teacher needs to be available for a student at all times. (*Zayed, FG 4*)

Aziz, FG6, spoke about the teachers' heavy workloads and how these were affecting students and suggested decreasing the teaching load in order to meet the students' needs:

About advising really what affects advising ... you have so many courses to teach you really cannot focus on advising because while you have six courses you need to do an assessment for all of these courses. (*Aziz, F6*)

Ziad, FG6, also spoke about students needing follow up with their teachers, as one session is rarely enough to solve all their issues:

As mentioned you know it's very important that you give the advice and follow it up formally and on informally weekly basis in the class outside the class corridors. (*Ziad, FG6*)

An interesting point made by Adel regarding students who continuously ask for access to their teachers is to direct them for help through other sources and not just the teacher:

You can also ask them to use the facilities that are available in the college like the academic success centre. (*Adel, FG6*)

To conclude, data from these themes have revealed a number of concerns from participating students and teachers in relation to their access to each other outside the classroom. While FG3 participants enjoy 'unlimited' access to their FG5 teachers, who see them for at least 12 hours a week, FG4 students and their FG6 teachers struggle even to make initial contact with each other. This problem was highlighted by some students who had never met their supervisors or did not even know who they were. These difficulties of connecting with each other are caused by a variety of factors such as scheduling as highlighted in theme 2 under the heading of 'Programme Demands', and teachers' workloads; as well as a lack of a precise mechanism as outlined in theme 1 under the heading of the 'Transition Period'. It was clear from the data that there are disparities between what teachers and students expect from their interactions with each other. On the one hand, the majority of students have high expectations regarding their teachers which go beyond those teachers' academic role. They want their teachers to be like a big brother figure, like a parent, a friend and someone they

can go to for anything and everything. The teachers, on the other hand, prefer to draw boundaries to their interactions with students.

## **4.5 Theme 4: Student-Teacher Relationships**

This theme is supported by Pennings et al. (2018) who highlighted that teacher-student relationships play a significant role in ensuring good quality teaching and learning; an essential component in promoting student retention and success. A good relationship between staff and students was also identified in the 'What Works, Student Retention and Success' project (Thomas et al., 2017) as an enabler for student engagement and success in higher education. The student-teacher relationship also emerged from data quite strongly, not just in this theme but in other themes as well, e.g. themes 1, 2 and 3. Three sub-themes emerged: 1) caring teachers; 2) formal interaction, and 3) informal interaction.

### **4.5.1 Caring Teachers**

This sub-theme has been informed by the literature which explored the importance of the care factors involved in student learning that can enhance students' intrinsic motivation. Komarraju et al. (2010) found factors such as: a) respect, b) connectedness and c) care were important features of a positive teacher-student interaction.

Caring was identified as the primary characteristic of a good teacher for the students in Focus Groups 3 and 4, which indicates that the way students feel about their teachers has a direct effect on their retention and success. FG4 participants emphasised care as an important teacher characteristic:

A good teacher is the one who cares, meaning he cares about the student. (*Tarek*)

Other participants also agreed with Tarek about the value of a caring teacher:

The teacher who cares and tells you okay, after class come with me, and I will help you with your lesson, so this care makes the student want to study and succeed. .... (*Salem, FG4*)

She cares about each student and gives you practice. She would also interact with you through email or through meeting with her. *(Talal, FG4)*

Similar to what student Talal said, a good teacher is a teacher that can actually engage the student through the lecture. ... *(Abubakar, FG4)*

He enters the class and will greet and say “how are you?” and makes it seem like he is happy to teach you. This will make you engage with him. *(Salem, FG4)*

Talal spoke at length about the impact of a caring teacher on his motivation and progress:

She (the teacher) would show me the steps, she cares about each student and gives them practice. She would also interact with you through email and meetings. Believe me, when I was with her, I understood the subject and liked the teacher. Before that, I hated the subject and got C-. This teacher has changed my view completely about Physics, knowing that this subject I hated in university. *(Talal, FG4)*

Students were also passionate about having a caring teacher and stated that caring does not require much effort and can be done through simple gestures:

About me, my teacher doesn't even greet you. He comes in the morning without saying hello and straight away he goes and starts explaining the lesson. Half an hour before the lesson ends, he leaves. There is no greeting, or how are you *(Salem, FG4)*

Some of the FG5 teachers like Patricia, Alan and Zainab also highlighted the importance of the care element in promoting rapport and trust:

I think the key thing is, as you were saying before, is just to build that rapport because it makes everything easier as well. But also you have to trust them and show that you trust their abilities as well. *(Patricia, FG5)*

I would say that by developing that trust, then you do extra respect. A lot of the students respond to that better. *(Alan, FG5)*

I agree, but I also feel that the teacher must genuinely care about the student she's teaching. It's very important. Because of the kind of advice, the approaches you use, your, you need to help them comes from inside. *(Zainab, FG5)*

These statements are further evidence that students in this context are affected by their interpersonal relationships with teachers, a characteristic that has occurred through most themes.

#### **4.5.2 Formal Interaction**

A positive relationship between students and teachers has been identified in the literature as an important factor for student engagement and achievement (Roorda et al., 2011). It is noticeable that disengaged students often lack positive relationships with their teachers, and are often likely to be in conflict with them (Jennings and Greenberg, 2009).

Students in FG3 and FG4 were asked about their preference for who should conduct the academic advising sessions: i) their own teacher, ii) a teacher who does not know them or iii) an administrative, academic advisor who does not teach them. The two student focus groups' participants had opposing views; Focus Group 3, Foundation students, preferred to have their own teacher who knows them better and makes them feel relaxed. Answering the question of whether the advisor should be someone who does not teach them:

No, because you know the teacher, if you see someone for the first time and he is not your teacher, you might not feel relaxed. (*Sultan*)

However, Focus Group 2 participants emphasised the importance of having their teacher as an advisor:

The academic advising session was beneficial. We suggest that the subject teacher is involved in all academic advising sessions. (*Omar, FG2*)

Your teacher knows you better. If someone else comes and says that I've done such or haven't done such and such, it's different from your teacher. (*Mubarak, FG3*)

All five students of focus FG4 preferred to have an administrator who is dedicated to academic advising and not teaching. They felt that this person would have more time and be better aware of the rules and regulations than a teacher who is overworked and also perhaps less well-informed:

A person dedicated to advising knows he has time. It makes a big difference if we get on with each other, but if we have a teaching advisor in class, and we do not get along, and I need his help, I will be affected. *(Salem, FG4)*

Members of Focus Group 5, who are all Foundation teachers, suggested that advising is better done by the teacher who teaches the students being advised as such a relationship promotes engagement and facilitates follow up about the progress of those students:

Only the teacher who is teaching that student would know if that student is capable of certain things .... I feel that it'll be much, much better if the teacher teaching this student does it herself instead of someone else. *(Zainab, FG5)*

Zainab added that the link between classroom commitment and success is high, and having teachers as advisors of their own students would be advantageous:

I think you need to know the commitment of the student in the classroom .... and only the class teacher would know. Again, we are fortunate because we can handle that group. We have up to 25 students per class, but honestly, I don't think we can manage to do that with each student if we have 40 students in a class. *(Zainab, FG5)*

Paul also spoke about the benefits of having the main teacher in the Foundation Programme as he / she usually sees their students for at least 10 hours a week:

Our students, they really have one main teacher, and they're studying one course, so it makes sense to have that main teacher. *(Paul, FG5)*

Focus Group 3 students prefer to have short advising sessions with specific goals, which should not be conducted late in the day:

An advising session shouldn't be too long, so a student doesn't get bored. They could divide it day-by-day for example, or week-by-week. They also need to tell you about other programmes, so you don't get bored. *(Sultan, FG3)*

We should talk during advising sessions about important things that we understand. *(Mubarak, FG3)*

Frankly, I don't recommend that the session should be too long, and it shouldn't be late in the afternoons, because most students would not come. (*Sultan, FG3*)

However, FG3 participants also suggest that, where necessary, the teacher should provide longer sessions based on the needs of the students:

Not just five minutes... the adviser could give you longer if you have more issues compared to other students. (*Sultan, FG3*)

Students from both focus groups agreed that academic advising had a positive impact on their retention and success in many ways. Student participants commented on these benefits:

This was very useful, it helps students and supports me and gives me tips about how to succeed. For example, I got 59% in my English grade, and the teacher told me during the meeting I need to do 'this and that', which helped me pass. This has helped me. (*Mahmoud, FG 2*)

When asked if academic advising has contributed to their retention and success, Focus Group 3 students strongly agreed, giving some examples of these benefits:

We benefitted a lot from the one-to-one session because to start with I did not concentrate on certain points, for example, writing and during the one to one session the teacher gave me advice step by step. (*Mubarak, FG3*)

Students from both FG 3 and 4 commented about some drawbacks to their academic advising with teachers, by stating that not all students are lucky with their academic advising sessions. In particular, these interactions depend on variables such as how the advisees get on with their advisor. Mubarak (FG3) spoke about how the advising differs from one teacher to another:

Students have different views on academic advising. Some students say that academic advisors are good and give them good advice, and others say the opposite. Some say that their academic advisors talk too much about things that are not relevant. All students want is someone that gives them the right information, and that's it (*Mubarak, FG3*)

Both students and teachers agreed that some low-level students could benefit from having their academic advising done in Arabic; a point also highlighted in theme 2 under the language of communication sub-theme. On the one hand, while FG3 and FG4 students were not in agreement about who should conduct the academic advising, FG3 students and FG5 teachers were in full agreement that their teachers should be their advisors for the reasons mentioned above. On the other hand, students in FG4 and teachers in FG6 expressed totally opposing views to the members of Focus Groups 3 and 5 about who should conduct academic advising. Groups 4 and 6 suggested academic advising is better suited to an administrator who is dedicated to advising; with the group 4 students having much stronger views compared to the teachers. These opposing views are partly due to the advising systems that are available to both groups. The advising system for FG3 students and their teachers in FG5 works well because students are getting quality time and easy access to their advisors. However, students in FG4 and their teachers in FG6, are struggling to get access to each other due to a range of variables such as: i) lack of access to advisors, ii) teachers' too heavy workloads and iii) inadequate or non-existent advisor training. Also, their current advising system is limited to choosing courses according to a matrix; a job which can be better done by a dedicated administrator. What these students need is advising which caters for their individual needs, both academic and personal; a point expressed by Talal:

You feel like you are at home. You need this motivation from your family and from your teacher. When you receive positivity, you become positive. When no one cares, you become negative and careless. (*Talal, FG3*)

It is worth noting that FG3 students prefer their own teachers to be their academic advisors as they are with them for at least 10 hours per week; as a result those students are happy about their ease of access to someone who knows them well. FG4 students, however, do not have an academic advisor who they know well and would, therefore, rather have an administrator as someone to advise them on course choices and so forth.



Similar to academic advising, the student-teacher relationship during mentoring sessions can have both positive and negative impacts which, in turn, affect both retention and attrition rates. FG3 participants, such as Zayed, Mubarak and Sultan, stated some of the detrimental effects of an unsuitable mentor:

This is his (the teacher) job, and he should not make you hate learning. (Zayed)

(The teacher) does not demoralise us by saying this is difficult. (*Mubarak*)

Makes rules as he wishes and marks me absent for the simple reasons and asks you to leave class and make you hate college. (*Sultan*)

A good teacher should not dictate and act like authority and treat us harshly if we make mistakes and applies the rules. Good teaching is not just about learning. (*Mubarak*)

Not everything in class should be about learning. A teacher needs to be human, after all. (*Mubarak*)

If the teacher sees that a student looks preoccupied or is feeling low in class for whatever reason that is not necessarily related to class, he should support him and give him advice and not just study, study. (*Mubarak*)

Some focus group participants spoke at length about how their negative relationships with some of their teachers nearly led to those affected participants leaving college. These responses, together with the other examples cited above, indicate the ‘good teacher’ issue is an important area that needs to be addressed by the college and the institution as a whole:

It is him (the teacher) that builds that wall with me, for example, when I say that I have a question or inquiry, he will say come later. ... We know that there are good and bad teachers and when I need the teacher and went to him, it was really hard, and I barely passed with C- grade. ... If I benefited from his class, I wouldn't have gone and seen him.... ...I have lots of inquiries and clarifications. (*Talal, FG4*)

Teachers also highlighted some of the impacts of a mentor, which demonstrated the potential role of both advisers and mentors:

Sure especially the first years I think because at this stage the student is not determined yet what he will study or which major; or he may want to go to the workforce and then come back or go to another college. (*Adel, FG6*)

Giving them situations so that they can create a mental image or mental picture, and being mindful of the different learning styles that students may have known, some students are more visual. (*Mark, FG6*)

Another form of student-teacher relationship is manifested through mentoring, but unfortunately students and teachers alike were confused about the meaning of mentoring. As discussed in the literature review, there are also issues with defining the role of 'mentor', which tends to be mixed with the role of the academic advisor. Mentoring is the next level of engagement for an academic advisor (Baker and Griffin, 2010), ideally involving an emotional commitment that extends beyond sharing degree requirements. Mentoring relationships entail caring about a student's personal and professional development: a holistic perspective.

Focus group participants were vague about what mentoring meant. Students from focus groups 3 and 4 were particularly confused as the term does not even exist in Arabic, as 'academic advising' is used to mean both. As these two focus groups progressed, it became apparent that students' understanding of the meanings and purposes of mentoring was sometimes quite limited. Even when a definition was given to the students, they managed to confuse mentoring with informal interaction. I found it necessary to give FG3 and FG4 participants an operational definitions of what constituted mentoring (see appendices 5 and 10). As a result of this confusion, students in both focus groups had less to say about mentoring, compared to academic advising, which is already established as a process within the college. The issue of mentoring's definition will be further explored in the discussion chapter. Even the teachers in Focus Group 6 needed a definition to help them understand how mentoring differs from academic advising.

The participants were later asked to give examples of their understanding of mentoring, based on their experiences. Generally, the students associate mentoring with a caring teacher and a role model.

(the teacher) asks me when I am feeling low. (*Sultan, GF3*)

(the teacher) inquires about me when I am absent and pairs me with another student to help me. (*Zayed, FG3*)

Focus Group 4 students linked mentoring to the themes they discussed as part of the informal interaction section:

The mentor is the next step to the advisor. The mentor needs to be a role model for students. He cares about students, and you want to be like him. (*Abubakar, FG6*)

The teachers in FG 5 and 6 were not sure how mentoring contributed to retention and success, but felt that is a positive factor as highlighted by Paul and Zainab below:

(Mentoring) is a very hard thing to measure, isn't it? How do you measure the value of that kind of interaction? It's not very quantifiable. So I don't know how it contributes to retention and success. I mean, I feel like it's a positive thing. I feel like it adds value to their experience as students. I feel like it is good for students to have that kind of interaction and I also feel like there are students who definitely need that kind of guidance beyond simply, you know, this is how you study, or this is what you need to work on. (*Paul, FG5*)

Surprisingly, FG3 students prefer to speak in English during mentoring so as to understand new things. This is an interesting point, especially as they feel differently about academic advising, which they prefer to be done in Arabic. They added that they would like the informal interactions, such as mentoring, to be done in English and the academic advising in Arabic:

When we do mentor with the teacher, we learned a lot because she used new words and phrases so I made an effort to understand". (*Sultan, FG3*).

Level 1 is different because students at that level don't understand a lot of English. (*Zayed, FG3*)

Teachers of FG 5 think that sometimes it is difficult, even counterproductive, trying to conduct mentoring in English with students of low levels. However, with experience and the help of tools such as 'Google Translate' it is possible to communicate. Zainab and Patricia said that sometimes students act as translators to get their message across to weaker students. Some native English teachers in FG5 commented on how using some Arabic words and phrases they had learned helped to create a connection with students:

I actually use them (Arabic words), that's one of the reasons I do use Arabic because I feel like if they hear my terrible pronunciation, they won't feel so bad about making mistakes in English. I use Arabic for very basic words. I use it for grammatical words, my word forms and verb, noun and adjective. (*Paul, FG5*)

The issue of mentoring will be further explored in Chapter 5: 'Discussion'.

### **4.5.3 Informal Interaction**

This sub-theme is supported by the literature which finds that the more often students have out-of-classroom interactions with their teachers, the better the quality of the relationship and the more connected they became with their institution (Bernstein-Yamashiro and Noam, 2013; Roorda et al., 2011). The literature also found various benefits to informal student-teacher interactions. For instance Bernstein-Yamashiro and Noam (2013) found that these relationships are emotionally helpful and meaningful, and they also represent the integration of the emotional and intellectual aspects of learning and teaching.

Various topics emerged as part of this sub-theme, which can be summarised in the following points: a) the type of informal interaction that happens between students and teachers; b) students' need for informal interaction and its impact on their motivation and success; and c) students' expectation of the informal interactions and d) the need to have some boundaries.

Students provided an example of the type of informal interaction that happens in and outside of the classroom with their teachers and how this interaction impacts their retention and success. Examples of the forms of interaction engaged in included: a) talking about social interests such as hobbies, movies, weekend activities in the classroom; b) talking about academic matters including asking for assistance, checking how you are coping; c) communicating through social media; and d) any gesture to show that a teacher cares:

He would, for example, ask you about your hobbies, what movies do you watch, what you do during the weekend. (*Tarek, FG4*)

Talal spoke about how even the simplest of gestures from the teacher motivate him and keep him engaged and connected:

The simplest thing is that he could ask you about what difficulties you are facing or he would just kindly say ask for help if you need. (*Talal, FG4*)

Students also spoke about the importance of having limits to the informal interactions, which should be limited to college matters, especially as some students might go too far:

Some students, for example, say give me your mobile and want to communicate through WhatsApp, this is not right. You can ask him how you are and what you did during the holidays, but you don't ask him personal questions. (*Tarek, 4*)

No, this is not right. If you have anything related to college, there are limits, you can ask how you are ... etc, but not more. (*Salem, FG4*)

Teachers like Zainab and Alan, (FG5) also gave examples of the type of informal interaction they have with students. These moments can be at the end of classes or during breaks which are linked to their studies, or just bumping into them anywhere within the college premises:

I do catch up with them (students) on what they are up to during the breaks. Usually they will be sharing about their pets or a concert they are going to next weekend. I think that time actually builds rapport and shows how comfortable they are with you. (*Zainab, FG5*)

I would say most of the informal interaction is bumping into them, meeting, greeting them; whether it's just before classes, or with students that you had in a different section. The nature is quite casual because you're not in a teaching or learning environment. That's when you get to know them because what you're talking about could be stuff like sports or football. Once they know what you're interested in as well, they like to ask you questions. So you get to know them in a nicer, casual way. (*Alan, FG5*)

FG6 teachers also gave further examples of how they interact with students informally, using technology such as WhatsApp and email; bearing in mind that they have less face-to-face contact with their students compared to FG 5 teachers:

There are many ways of a communicating: WhatsApp, voice notes, emails, even in the corridors or cafeteria etc.... (*Mark, FG6*)

Adel also explained the students need to communicate informally as a follow up to formal matters that happen in the classroom, such as when they need clarification about procedures like missing an exam:

They (students) like to approach you informally to find out how they can do the formal way, sometimes they miss an exam, or they miss a class, and then they have the excuse, or they don't know how to submit that, or maybe they want to make sure, so they will come in the break, between the classes or they will like to see you while you are working in the office. (*Adel, FG6*)

Participants spoke about the positive impact of informal interaction and how it promotes retention and success through raising their motivation about their courses, as well as raising their expectations to achieve better grades:

If the teacher talks to me informally, meaning he jokes with me, which would strengthen our relationship and trust, this could help you understand better. (*Tarek, FG 4*)

I think that being informal feeds your mentality. Formality feeds you academically and helps you in life matters. ... But when you are informal, the

same as Tarek, the trust strengthens and the student becomes more interested in the subject. (*Salem, FG 4*)

Some participants like Abubaker, FG4, expressed their disappointment for having little or no informal interaction with their teachers:

Actually, now, to be honest, there is no informal interaction between me and any teacher. (*Abubakar, FG4*)

Teachers from FG5 and 6 also gave examples of how informal interaction promotes retention through building a good rapport and establishing a positive relationship which promotes engagement in and outside of the classroom:

I agree that informal interaction gives good rapport and establishing a cordial relationship with the students makes your job easier. If you establish a positive relationship, it becomes easier to negotiate changes in behaviour that you want to see. (*Paul, FG5*)

I think it does (promotes retention), I think they (students) are happier. They feel more comfortable, they are relaxed and there's a time to be formal and there is a time to be informal. (*Alan, FG5*)

Student and teacher participants also spoke about some drawbacks of informal interaction. Students gave examples of the negative effects when informal interaction goes wrong:

There was this teacher whose attitude of talking was not okay. As a result, I decided to not talk (informally) to any teacher ... for me, the attitude of the teacher I mentioned has to be adjusted. When a teacher talks to someone, he should talk like he's his son or brother or big brother. (*Tarek, FG6*)

Your teacher shouldn't build a barrier between you and him. When he helps you, you look at him differently. (*Talal, FG6*)

Teachers from FG5 also spoke about some potential negative effects of informal interactions and the importance of differentiating between 'being friends' and 'being friendly', as well as the need to establish parameters to the relationship:

I never give out my mobile number to a student and I would never give out my personal info to a student. I have always maintained that you can be friendly without being friends. (*Paul, FG 5*)

You draw the lines, you have to establish the parameters of that relationship. I am still your teacher, you are still my student. You can be friendly in the classroom, as you say, it doesn't mean you're going to develop a deeper relationship. (*Alan, F5*)

FG6 teachers also talked about the issues of building trust and of problems caused by miscommunication that could lead to students putting the blame on teachers for poor judgment or wrong decisions:

You need to develop some kind of relationship, and there needs to be trusted, you are guardian of the students while they are being educated in your institution. (*Mark, FG6*)

Students do not show up if they make an appointment ... maybe after sending so many reminders, you get 50% of them that's probably an achievement... . They will probably just grab you informally somewhere, and they pass some message. (*Ziad, FG6*)

Some participants expressed concerns about the misuse of social media and the importance of having boundaries:

Actually when we mention social media to be used to interact that might be tricky because it might be misused and the best ways are to use official channels (*Ziad, FG6*)

An interesting common feature is that the majority of students in this part of the world express a strong dependence on teachers and hence the need to interact with them informally. Both students and teachers were in agreement about the importance of communicating informally to engage students and enhance their success. At the same time, they had concerns about how informal interaction could go wrong and hence called for the need to have guidelines for, as well as boundaries to, this type of interaction. Some teachers, especially



those in Focus Group 6, had some concerns about the constant need for students to interact with them informally and how miscommunication during these interactions could lead to conflict with students; especially when a wrong decision is made about a student's choice of course or courses.

In conclusion, focus group participants spoke at length about the importance of student-teacher relationships and how these shape their commitment and motivation regarding their studies. As is the case with themes 1, 2, and 3, a teacher who cares about students and treats them like human beings in and outside the classroom was an important contributing factor to a student's persistence and success. The teachers also expressed the importance of care "teaching from the heart", as described by Zainab, FG5. Participating students gave examples of what constitutes formal and informal interactions and how the relationships from these interactions could affect them positively or negatively as far as their motivation and success are concerned. The four focus groups had different views as to who should conduct academic advising. FG3 and FG5 strongly agreed that advising should be conducted by the class teacher, whereas FG4 and F6 preferred to have a person whose main role was dedicated to academic advising. These different views demonstrate that the foundation year's academic advising system seems to work but that the current academic advising process, which is used beyond the Foundation stage, has some deficiencies that will be addressed in the next chapter.

## **4.6 Theme 5: Individual Factors**

Fowler and Boylan (2010) suggested that increases in student success and retention can be achieved if educators also address other non-academic factors and personal issues that are related to their success. The focus groups within this research identified a number of the personal problems that contribute to withdrawal: a) military service (analysed under theme 1 above), b) employment and family commitments which are heightened and significant in this culture, c) special needs and disabilities which lack diagnosis, recognition and support

within the college due to a lack of expertise, as well as d) poor health as a result of genetic diseases which are prevalent in this country.

#### **4.6.1 Employment and Family**

Family and work commitments, as well as other personal circumstances, are examples of non-academic factors that can interfere with successful completion of educational objectives (Bye et al., 2007). Key findings of this sub-theme which emerged from the data are: a) some students enter higher education as a stop-gap until they secure full-time employment; b) some students have to work and study to support themselves and their families, or even to keep up with peers; and c) students who combine study and employment very often experience difficulties. This latter factor is exacerbated by the lack of part-time employment in this context, as well as the lack of institutional flexibility to study part-time, or on a reduced level, in order to facilitate combining employment and higher education study.

The data indicate that there is an increased number of students, such as Muath (FG2) who use the college as a stop-gap while seeking employment opportunities:

I was not ready, I just came with the intention to stay till I get a job. I did not know that I had to study everything in English. (*Muath, FG2*)

Employment is a greater issue for non-traditional students who are in full-time employment as well as full-time education. In this context, students are less likely to persist when compared to students in part-time jobs or those who are not working.

Students often argue that the college rules and regulations do not allow for part-time study and that the college expects students to attend all their evening classes from 3:30 pm to 8:20 pm. By 5:30 pm, most students are disconnected from their lessons due to tiredness. The majority of these students are married and have children; they are therefore obliged to work and earn a degree that guarantees them better benefits and more promotional opportunities at work. These students have very little time for a social life during the week and are often

critical about the institution's inflexibility, expecting the college to restructure its schedules to meet their particular needs.

Some participating students spoke about their difficult family circumstances which affected their academic life. Sultan (FG3) also highlighted the effects of family and employment commitments on studies by stating:

Yes, it has a lot of effect on this. For example, if you are the only boy in your family, and you have to both study and work, you are under pressure of studying and seeing your family. (*Sultan, FG3*)

Another social aspect which is relevant to the Middle Eastern culture is the fact that once a male student reaches 18 years of age, it is regarded as unacceptable to rely on parents for financial support while studying.

#### **4.6.2 Special Education Needs**

Fowler and Boylan (2010) suggest that increases in student success and retention can be achieved if educators also address other non-academic factors and personal issues that are related to student success. Malik (2011) refers to students with these non-academic factors and personal issues as high-risk students who are less likely to persist in higher education. Students with special needs in the context under investigation, though outside the remit of this study, include students with autism, Down syndrome, hearing and visual impairments, speech and language impairments and some genetically transmitted diseases such as thalassemia. Many of these are high-risk students especially when considering that our institution does not have the resources and expertise to cater for their needs.

Students with such special needs are, therefore, at greater risk of attrition due to a variety of factors such as: a) lack of support, b) lack of knowledge and expertise about issues related to their needs, as well as c) non-diagnosis of cases. The institution commits itself to admit all students but then is not able to cater for all their needs. The college does not have the expertise and there are no resources in place to accommodate their academic and social

requirements. There are some success stories with certain students with special needs like Saif from FG2 who progressed to his major successfully. He has a speech impairment (severe stuttering), which gets worse when he is under stress or in unfamiliar settings and becomes mild and sometimes unnoticeable when he is relaxed. Saif tries to avoid stressful situations, such as getting his parents involved in his college matters:

I don't like my parents to be involved, I can show my mother my grades, but I don't like to worry her with attendance warning messages. (*Saif, FG2*)

In summary, this theme has dealt with various individual factors that affect student retention. Some of these factors are related to students' personal circumstances, such as family and employment. Although this theme was not thoroughly discussed in the focus groups, existing college attrition data, as shown in Figure 5 above, indicates that it is an important contributing factor to student attrition. Working while studying, and having a family at the same time, proved to be a significant challenge, especially for non-traditional students who have little time to fulfil all their duties.

## **Chapter 5 – Discussion**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the main themes and factors that have emerged from this investigation into what issues influence the retention of students and their engagement in tertiary education programmes in the Middle East. The discussion also assesses the role of teachers in influencing at-risk students' engagement during the students' first year at college. After discussing the findings and explaining their impact on student retention, the themes are then linked to the literature in order to examine if they resonate with other research from the UK and the USA, as well as the institution's existing quantitative data. Finally, drawing from the literature and the findings of this investigation, the chapter concludes with a theoretical model that attempts to address four risk areas of a student's journey in this context and present strategies on how to tackle them. These four areas are: a) pre-entry; b) transition period; c) formal interaction between students and teachers, and d) informal interaction between students and teachers.

### **5.2 Student Readiness and Preparedness**

Focus group participants expressed their frustration about the issues they faced during their schooling which, in turn, affected their higher education. These students are at-risk of dropping out from college, as they are unprepared for the learning challenges they will face. Such a disadvantage makes them less likely to graduate, either because they are dismissed by the institution, or they leave voluntarily (Sherwin, 2012). Even though the college is not at fault regarding pre-entry matters, the institution must learn about the background of its new students in order to understand how to better assist them to succeed in their studies. Most, but not all, of these issues are embedded in the school education system. Failing to meet the required English proficiency benchmarks (Lane, 2011) has meant that a large number of first-year students have to enter a one-year preparatory Foundation Programme

designed to help the underprepared cohort of new students. Such a preparatory year plays a significant role in shaping students' academic studies and future career paths (Al Katheri, 2014).

As stated in Chapter 2, the literature differentiates between the terms 'readiness' and 'preparedness'. Preparedness represents the academic knowledge and skill levels in reading and mathematics that are necessary for entry to a credit-bearing general education course that fulfils degree requirements. Academic preparedness is different from college readiness because, in addition to academic skills, readiness encompasses behavioural aspects of individual performance related to student engagement. Readiness includes characteristics such as persistence, time management, interpersonal skills, and knowledge of the context of college.

Identifying students who are underprepared is not straightforward. While identifying the factors that exist in the holistic preparation of a student for higher education, the research often focuses solely on indicators of academic performance, such as test scores and grade point averages (Porter and Polikoff, 2012). However, students' high school grades do reflect some non-cognitive factors and therefore can be indicative of a student's retention potential in higher education. Komarraju et al. (2013) suggested that standardised test scores are a good indicator of future performance in higher education. Sullivan and Nielsen (2013) also have a similar view, suggesting that the best indication of college readiness is in students' class performances. Singell and Waddell (2010) countered by noting that in-class performance and exam scores are non-significant when predicting college performance. In my view, these conflicting views are caused by the fact that students' grades do not necessarily measure the cognitive abilities which are essential in defining underprepared students. The reason that, for some researchers, academic grades are a good indicator of potential is that they can be standardised. In the context under investigation, students' preparedness is measured by their English placement test score;

a point mentioned earlier. Students who have an academic IELTS score of 5 or an English SAT level of 1100 and over are regarded as ‘prepared’. However, the issue is more complex because these English scores are not necessarily good academic preparedness indicators. For example, a student who gets a band 5 in IELTS is regarded as prepared, but a student can score as low as 3.5 in essential skills such as writing and still get an IELTS 5 and progress to his or her major. Such students would struggle in their programmes as they do not have enough English to write basic reports or essays. There are also students with very high school averages, who excel in an Arabic curriculum but are regarded as unprepared because they do not meet the English medium programme’s requirements.

### **5.2.1 Academic Skills**

Underprepared students face obstacles which require them to gain the necessary skills to facilitate success (Al Shehri, 2012). The literature has also revealed that not all students who meet the English requirements are prepared, as many lack some necessary basic skills for success in higher education (Sparkman et al., 2012). A large proportion of our Foundation students are at risk because they are academically underprepared, and they also lack the required ‘high cognitive skills’ (Crowe et al., 2008) such as: a) independent learning, b) problem-solving, c) critical thinking, and d) appreciation of teamwork which makes them even less likely to persist in higher education. Fowler and Boylan (2010) suggested that increases in students’ success and retention rates can be achieved if educators also address other non-academic factors such as the various cognitive skills and personal issues that are related to their success. Al Katheri (2014) also found that student success in the preparatory year in Saudi Arabia plays a significant role in shaping students’ academic studies and future career paths.

The college’s existing quantitative data indicate that students who join us with a better level of English proficiency are more likely to persist in their studies when compared to those

students who are weaker in English, partly due to the fact that English is the language of instruction. The Foundation Department records show that 93% of the students who joined in Level 4 progressed to their major in semester 1 in 2016/2017, but only 54% of the level 1 students progressed to Level 2. Furthermore, only 15% of these Level 1 students progressed to their major at the end of the foundation year. The unfortunate reality is that students in this college begin their tertiary education with levels of English that are insufficient to enable them to learn when English is the medium of instruction (Tabari, 2014). Despite the benefits of the preparatory year cited above, it can also be an obstacle to students from an academic perspective (Abdelaal, 2010). In particular, that year causes their options to be restricted and so they are unable to choose their preferred courses until they have met all pre-requisite requirements such as certain levels of English and Maths. Quantitative institutional data on student engagement also indicate that our students are coming to college underprepared. The Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE) is administered by the Centre for Community Colleges Students Engagement, Austin, Texas. The aim of the survey is to collect new and actionable data on the experiences of new students at our college. Data from the survey, which is conducted on the fourth week of each semester, show that 22 % of the students in my context did not know how to progress in the programme they were in (Appendix 12).

Data from FG6 revealed that the students' constant need for access to help from their teachers and administrators is partly due to their lack of soft skills. In a study of the academic literacy development of a group of students, conducted by Bilikozen (2015) at the American University of Sharjah, UAE, it was found that these soft skills, which can be learned independently from subject knowledge, have a direct effect on learning English. Research in this field often tends to focus on indicators of academic performance, such as test scores and grade point averages (Porter and Polikoff, 2012). Students' high school grades may reflect some non-cognitive factors, and therefore, can be indicative of student retention in



higher education (Komarraju et al., 2013). However, in my context it is assumed that all Foundation students lack these non-cognitive skills because their grades are low, which is not always the case, as highlighted in the data. Students in FG3 and FG4 explained that none of the students had exposure to learning these skills at school.

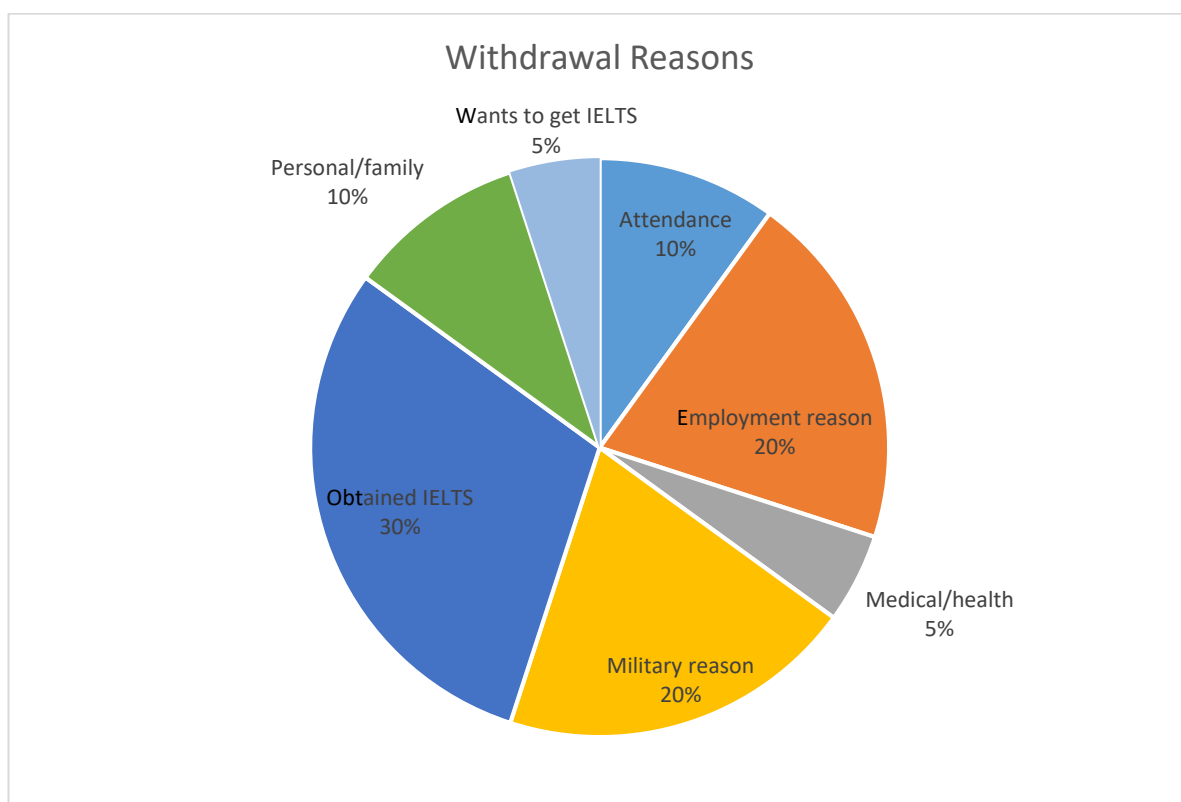
As mentioned in Chapter 2, similar studies in the region such as Abdelal (2010) in Saudi Arabia, have shown that the lack of a preparatory year, prior to full-time tertiary education, can create an obstacle for students that hinders their development both socially and academically. Although the focus group participants felt that the preparatory foundation year was delaying their graduation, they felt that they benefited in acquiring certain skills that they needed to succeed in their studies. Alan (FG5) expressed concern about the lack of study skills amongst Foundation students and suggested that this issue needed to be addressed earlier, during the transition period. Focus Group 6 teachers, such as Aziz and Adel think that students are too attached to, or dependent upon, their teachers due to the lack of these skills. This deficit means such students always need assistance to deal with issues that they should be able to figure out by themselves.

### **5.2.2 Military Service**

Although military service itself has not been addressed in the literature as a possible cause for student attrition, this is a sub-theme that has emerged from the data. Military service is an issue which can fall under the multitude of reasons that are highlighted in the literature as affecting student success; other factors being: i) illness, ii) family problems, iii) employment demands, iv) attendance and v) motivation (Sullivan and Nielsen, 2013).

The introduction of military service has a direct effect on student retention and engagement, as revealed by the focus group data. Participating students expressed concern about the current 18 months' military service (likely to increase to two years) and the way it affects their academic standards, due to the long gap between leaving school and starting their higher education. The existing college quantitative data show that in the academic year

2015/2016, 12.5% of the students were unable to meet the requirement of progressing to the next course by the end of their allotted time. In 2016/2017, the figures were similar at 11%. All these students had done their military service. Although this is not their only reason for failing to progress, the one-year military service had a role to play in weakening their persistence according to some participants from Focus Groups 3 and 4. In semester 2, 2015, after military service was introduced, 20% of the students left college to join the military, as shown in Figure 5 below. The previous reports, such as from 2013, do not show military service as a reason for withdrawal because that obligation did not yet exist. The impact of military service on students' academic success and retention has not been investigated elsewhere: not even in the regions where compulsory military service is practised. This lack of research is partly because, in those countries, students go to military service after completing their higher education, and not before.



**Figure 5: Semester 2 - 2014/2015 Attrition Report. Source: College Data**

### 5.2.3 Transition Period

Focus group students were very critical about the lack of a smooth transition into academic life at the college. They spoke about the difficulty of finding their advisors as was the case for Salem (FG4) who spoke about his negative transition period, difficulties in locating his academic advisor and being 'lost' during the first few weeks of entering college. Waiting for long hours at Academic Services to get registered in their courses was another concern raised by participants. Abubakar (FG4) spoke at length about his turmoil of running back and forth between his department and academic services, while also trying to register for courses, as well as obtain exemptions for courses he had taken elsewhere. Participating students also addressed the lack of a comprehensive orientation programme for new students.

Transition is particularly an issue during the first few weeks, where attrition is known to be high (Bovill et al., 2011). The literature also indicates that the risk of withdrawal of a student from an academic programme is relatively high during his/her first year, and notably higher during the first few weeks (Malik, 2011). Many students experience difficulties with the transition into the first year of higher education; the period when the attrition rate is at its highest (Wintre and Yaffe, 2000). Harvey et al. (2006) also emphasised that the first year is a crucial part of the long process of cultural, social and academic integration into higher education. In his formula of retention, Seidman (2005) highlighted the importance of early identification of risk factors which could happen, or are likely to happen, during the transition period. Thomas (2012) developed Bourdieu's institution habitus concept and referred to nurturing the culture of 'student-belonging', especially during the first year, as a modern approach to student retention. The literature has also highlighted the significant role that a smooth transition from school level to tertiary level education plays in shaping students' academic studies and future career paths (Al Katheri, 2014).

The available college data about student satisfaction with support services, as shown in Table 6 below, indicate that there is a significant decline from 100% in 2013 to 65% in 2015; a drop which further supports what the focus group said and what the literature has revealed. This drop could be due to the considerable changes that have taken place in the institution, where the focus is now mainly on administrative procedures at the expense of student life. This significant change of focus is a negative issue which has not been adequately addressed. Other exiting-focused quantitative data confirm students' confusion and lack of support during their first few weeks. As shown in the most recent SENSE survey 24% of the students said they could not find their way around the college and 19% did not know who to go to if they needed help.

Table 6: Satisfaction with Student Support Services (Source: College Portal)

	<b>2013 - 2014</b>	<b>2014 - 2015</b>	<b>2015 - 2016</b>
<b>College</b>	100%	63%	65%
<b>College System</b>	75%	68%	65%

Other college quantitative data also confirm that student attrition during the first 20 days in college is high, as shown in Table 7; 30% of all the 2016/2017 semester one students left within 20 days of joining college. 46% of these early leavers were in the lower English level; an indication that the risk of withdrawal is highest amongst those students compared to the students in Level 3 and 4.

**Table 7: First four weeks attrition rate (Semester 1, 2016/2017)**

<b>New Foundations Withdrawals</b>			
<b>Section</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total withdrawals Before day 20</b>
1	Pre FND Sec 01	11	5
2	Pre FND Sec 02	11	9
3	Level 1 Sec 1	28	3
4	Level 2 Sec 1	25	4
5	Level 2 Sec 2	22	8
6	Level 3 Sec 1	24	1
7	Level 3 Sec 2	23	3
8	Level 3 Sec 3	19	6
9	Level 3 Sec 4	22	5
10	Level 3 Sec 5	24	1
		<b>209</b>	<b>63</b>

After recognising that students are facing a number of issues that negatively affect their retention and engagement, it is vital that the transition to college is made as smooth and stress-free as possible. Students expressed understandable concern and frustration about the lack of a proper orientation programme. Concern over inadequate orientation services correlates with research by Al Darmaki (2016), which indicated that there are issues related to lack of induction programmes and a failure to provide adequate information and resources, such as online booklets and guidance brochures. During the 2015/2016 academic year, only 54% of the freshmen participated in the orientation programme, a figure that increased slightly to 65% in 2016/2017. This troubling feedback raises the question about the effectiveness of the orientation day, which is often poorly attended. Students in the pilot focus group also spoke about the lack of information relating to the institution that they could access before they joined, and how they had very little support to help them overcome such difficulties. Students who are inadequately prepared before entering a tertiary education institution are more likely to face challenges in their studies compared to those who come prepared.

#### **5.2.4 Programme Demands**

Focus group students raised a number of concerns that affect their engagement; such as: a) the strict attendance policy, b) the length of the programme and c) the scheduling, which are all college procedures that have a negative impact on students. The literature raised concerns that retention as a phenomenon was often explained through a combination of 'negative' attributes and a failure on the part of students, and not also as a failure on the part of the education institution. However, those institutions were also responsible for influencing students' decisions to persist in their studies or leave (Habley et al., 2012). This theme explains how student engagement can be affected by a college's rules and procedures and calls for the need for the institution to review certain practices which are beyond the students' control.

#### **5.2.4.1 Attendance**

With regards to students' attendance, this issue has become a dilemma for students who think that the 15% maximum absence in any course is very harsh. However, as a counter-point the institution is trying to instil into its graduates qualities such as a good work ethic, including punctuality and good attendance. While some students like Zayed (FG3) expect teachers to be more lenient, other students like Abdulaziz (FG2) provided some more realistic solution such as taking into consideration sick notes for students who reach the 15% threshold.

#### **5.2.4.2 Length of Programme**

Up to the last years of this study, programme length was a major issue for students, especially those who start at lower levels and spend up to three years in the Foundation Programme. Fortunately, with Foundation now limited to a maximum of one year programme, the issue of the programme length is less of an issue, but it did affect students of Focus Group 2, and some students from Focus Groups 3, who witnessed the change from the old long Foundation Programme to the new shortened one.

#### **5.2.4.3 Scheduling**

Students spoke about issues related to class scheduling and how they affect their retention. Students complained that most classes are scheduled early in the morning, which leads to lateness, especially when there are issues with heavy traffic. Students also had concerns about spending long hours at college and felt that the long breaks between classes are not necessary, as they needed more time to have a balanced life outside college. Working students also expect some flexibility in scheduling their classes, so they do not have to rush to college immediately after their work ends. Schedules also affect some students' access to their academic advisors, especially in some cases like Tareq and Salem (FG4); these students always have classes when their advisors are free and vice versa. To resolve this

issue, some students like Mubarak (FG3) suggested scheduling regular sessions for advising as part of their weekly schedules.

### **5.3 Pedagogy Employed in the Classroom**

The notion of a good teacher and her/his impact on retaining at-risk students was highlighted during all focus groups by both students and teachers alike. Examples of how good teaching promotes retention and engagement, and how poor teaching could lead to attrition, were readily offered. The fact that classroom pedagogical practices have received significant levels of researchers' attention is an indicator that the topic is associated with student retention and engagement (Kuh et al., 2006). Davies (1999) argues that issues relating to pedagogy, active organisation and student support have the most significant impact on retention rates. For my focus group students, these pedagogical issues were important, but the interpersonal issues such as their relationship with teachers were more important. Bovill et al. (2008) also highlight the importance of the curriculum design of the first year in promoting academic engagement through encouraging learning communities, developing active learning approaches which incorporate small group work and modelling, as well as continuous assessment and feedback.

Focus group participants, teachers and students alike, spoke at length about the importance of classroom pedagogy in engaging students and enhancing their retention and engagement. The participants gave examples of various characteristics of a good teacher, such as:

- i) Caring towards all students regardless of their abilities (Mubarak and Sultan (FG3); Tariq, Salem, Talal (FG4).
- ii) Simplified learning (Rashed, Zayed, Mubarak, FG3) as supported by Ginsberg (2007) who highlights that good teaching is reflected in the classroom through pedagogical practices such as clarity.
- iii) Using technology to enhance learning (Mubarak and Sultan, FG3) as highlighted by Manuguerra and Petocz (2011) who stated that teachers in tertiary education



need new strategies to communicate with students of the 'net' generation and to provide enticing educational experiences for them.

- iv) Promotes collaborative learning between students (Mubarak, FG3). The literature also emphasised the decisive role of cooperative learning in improving students' motivation and engagement (Ormord, 2011). Al Allaq's (2016) qualitative study in the UAE found the structured application of cooperative learning is an effective teaching strategy that contributes to students' learning engagement, social awareness, cultural responsiveness and learning needs in general.

Although it was initially difficult for the teacher participants to reflect on themselves and identify a good teacher's characteristics, they came up with features such as:

a) Connects learning to real-life experience (Zainab and Patricia, FG5), an approach supported by Volkwein et al. (2000) who reported that the most consistently influential variables on students' academic achievement and cognitive growth were items about faculty behaviours representing being well-prepared for class and designing assignments students considered meaningful.

b) Being adaptable, flexible and able to 'wear different hats' (Alan, FG5, Ziad, FG6,)

Good teaching is reflected in the classroom through pedagogical practices such as: a) clarity (Ginsberg, 2007), b) in-service professional development (Boudersa, 2016), c) collaborative learning (Ormord, 2011) and d) cooperative learning (Al Allaq, 2016). All the above practices were emphasised in the literature as being important student retention factors. The focus group data indicate that there is a disparity amongst teachers in terms of possessing such qualities, which suggests this deficit is a point that needs addressing through teachers' in-service professional development and student teachers' initial training.

### **5.3.1 Language of Communication**

Language, as a medium of communication in the classroom, has emerged as an important theme both in the literature and research data. Lane (2011) found that many students in the Gulf-Arab region lack the English language necessary to succeed in institutions offering

high-quality education. Tabari (2014) found that students begin their tertiary education with insufficient levels of English to allow them to learn, when English is the medium of instruction, as is the case in the UAE.

Various concerns were also raised in the focus group meetings, which were context-specific; in some cases a feature of the region in particular and the Arab world in general. There is very little literature that provides insight into these issues, but these problems ought to be discussed since they have direct negative effects on student retention. The first of these issues is the language of communication. In the Arab world, students in government schools receive most of their primary and secondary education in an Arabic medium. However, in private schools, the instruction is in English, and when students reach college or university, they are expected to study most of their courses in a language other than Arabic (Tabari, 2014). This language is predominantly English in the Middle Eastern region and French in North African countries. The above government school situation leaves many students in the Middle East lacking the English language necessary to succeed in their institutions or those that are further afield (Lane, 2011). This is one of the main reasons why preparatory programmes, such as the foundation course, exist; they are designed to fill the gaps caused by the shift in the language of instruction from Arabic to English or French. The participants in Focus Group 3 expressed their concerns, especially regarding learning mathematics in English at the college. Their frustration was not about understanding the mathematical concepts, but about the language of mathematics. This shift of language of instruction raises the issue of whether this is the most effective way to teach these at-risk students?

### **5.3.2 Effective Teaching Strategies**

Unfortunately, and until very recently, the relevant literature on Arab mainstream education and many underdeveloped countries indicated that pedagogical practices at school encourage: i) submission, ii) obedience, iii) rote learning subordination, and iv) compliance rather than critical thinking (Hayes et al., 2011). In this context, rote learning

was another area of concern as the majority of students come from schools where rote learning was the norm. However, at the college, students are challenged as they are expected to learn via an interactive mode, which requires skills they may not necessarily possess. These skills include: a) teamwork, b) critical thinking and c) problem-solving. The school system is also primarily based on a traditional method of delivery where the teacher is the source of knowledge; therefore, when the teacher is absent there is no learning. However, at the college, education has become digital with all resources available online and students access them through either a laptop or tablet.

As shown in the data, students such as Khalid (FG2) spoke about their traditional method of learning at school and compared it with studying at college, where he and his peers are required to take responsibility for their learning. During the past three years, the college system has committed itself to international standards of mobile learning technology. This is a paradigm shift for high school graduates who join the institution with minimal experience of an online learning environment. The institution introduced 'iPads in the classroom' as an initiative to keep students engaged in, and motivated about, their learning in order for the college to generate and nurture better rates of retention. Students like Mubarak and Rashid (FG3) spoke about the importance of technology in promoting a fun learning environment by referring to software such as Kahoot. Students are also expected to take ownership of their learning in classrooms and courses, where the role of the teacher is more of a facilitator to learning than a supplier of information. Students are expected to make a quick adjustment to this new reality within their first foundation year in order to enhance their chances of success. These 'taking responsibility' skills are challenging for students to acquire because they need to be learned and developed over an extended period and not just during the foundation year. A student's motivation level starts to decline if he is obliged to repeat a level. These academic demands can cause a degree of stress and anxiety which the institution might not be aware of, because students do not usually mention 'academic

weakness' as a cause for them to decide to withdraw (Assiter and Gibbs, 2007). To address these issues, the institution under investigation introduced new general studies courses for first-year non- Foundation Programme that are geared to help students to overcome some of these difficulties. Focus group teachers addressed these concerns; Aziz (FG 6) spoke about difficulties for students finding information, as well as focusing attention on the not-always-helpful aural and oral aspects of their culture. Alan (FG5) spoke about many students' lack of basic skills, such as an inability to take notes during lessons/lectures.

## **5.4 Access to the Teacher Outside the Classroom**

### **5.4.1 Access to the Teacher**

Focus group participants, students and teachers alike, revealed some significant problems in the current academic advising system which need addressing. Students like Talal (FG4) recognised that teachers are too busy to provide adequate time for student advising. However, those students are frustrated that they are not getting access to advisors or, when they finally get access, the quality of that interaction is poor. Teachers like Aziz (FG6) also expressed their frustration at not being able to meet the students' needs, due to their heavy teaching workloads. It was, therefore, suggested that teaching loads should be reduced, and the current 1/40 advisor/advisee ratio lowered to meet the needs of the students. The data have also revealed that teachers' workload is just one of the issues; a lack of training for advisors is yet another. The fact that some students have called for having full-time administrative advisors, instead of teachers as advisors, reflects the lack of access to academic staff. It is also evidence of the perception that with an advisor solely dedicated to advising, the students are more likely to have better access to advisors and even better quality advice. Al Darmaki's (2016) study on the effectiveness of academic advising at a tertiary institution in the UAE, a similar context to mine, also found the need for a dedicated academic advisory service. It would seem reasonable to conclude that in the Middle East most faculty advisors are overworked and do not have adequate time for advising.

The issue of access to academic advisors was raised by students of Focus Groups 3 and 4. Some participants, like Abubakar and Saud (FG4), expressed concerns that they had never met their advisor or did not know who he or she was. Others like Salem (FG4) expressed concerns about the scheduling of advising sessions because of conflicting advisor-advisee schedules, where advisors are teaching when advisees are free and vice-versa. The literature has emphasised the importance of having frequent advising sessions to ensure maximum benefits for students. Williamson and Goosen (2014) found that students who attended two faculty advising sessions persisted at a rate of 85%, which was 32 percentage points higher than students who did not participate in the advising sessions. Khalil and Williamson (2014) also suggested that a well-advised student is likely to continue enrolling in classes and following his/her plan of study. Such a student will continue to progress towards graduation because they are well informed and aware of what it will take to be successful. It is important to note that while emphasising the importance of regular advising in student success, Khalil and Williamson also recognise that advising is labour intensive and it is critical that advisors have a balance in their jobs, so as to avoid burn-out. Taking into consideration the focus groups' findings, combined with the literature views on access to academic advisors, I think there is a need to invest more resources into the current college system. Such an investment could reduce the current advisor/advisee ratio and provide additionally trained advisors to support the teacher-advisors in dealing with cases that need ongoing access to advisors; particularly the at-risk students.

In terms of supporting at-risk students, the study revealed that an increasing number of students felt that there is a lack of sufficient support for at-risk students; mainly those who have increased absences due to personal circumstances. The existing college SENSE survey's quantitative data also confirm this issue. A considerable number of students, 31%, said they did not know how to contact their teachers if they needed help; a problem that was confirmed by students such Sultan (FG3) and all of the Focus Group 4 students. The latter

group called for additional support for academically challenged students by providing them with academic advising in their mother tongue (Arabic). Apart from Alan, all Focus Group 5 teachers agreed with FG3 and FG4 students that low-level students would benefit from having academic advising sessions delivered in Arabic. Alan's (FG5) opposing view was that academic advising is part of the English language learning process and should be delivered in English. In my opinion, it would not be logistically possible to deliver academic advising in Arabic, especially when most teachers who prefer advising their own students are English speakers, and are not able to converse in Arabic. I suggest that in extreme instances of at-risk low-level cases, an interpreter should be provided by the college via departments such as academic or student services. That support would ensure these individual cases would benefit from, rather than be confused by, their advising sessions. Having a robust academic advising strategy, as will be suggested in the next chapter, would be one of the solutions to tackling some of the above mentioned academic issues. Harrison (2009) suggested that such strategy should be an active process that promotes student development; a point of view with which I agree based on this current study.

#### **5.4.2 Student versus Teacher Expectations**

Some participants, who expressed how personal matters affected their learning, expected their teachers or mentors to help them with these particular issues. My data showed some examples of such expectation. Sultan (FG3) expected his teacher to ask him why he is 'feeling low' and Zayed (F3) also expected his teacher to ask about him when he is absent. Rashed (FG3) went further by assuming that a teacher should act like a father and a role model; therefore, if a student needs anything, they should go to their teacher. This mindset regarding the importance of teachers has been confirmed by researchers in this region, such as Al Darmaki (2016). In a study by Woolston (2002) it was found that students had negative perceptions about their mentor due to a mismatch between what the students wanted to discuss with their mentors, and what was considered as mentoring. Alan (FG5) spoke about

the importance of establishing parameters to the student-teacher relationship and suggested that being 'friendly' does not necessarily imply being a friend. Zainab (FG5) also commented about the level of maturity amongst students who tended to overstep the boundaries when they see that a teacher is friendly, and suggested that you have to draw a line regarding student-teacher interactions. Both student and teacher participants understood that there should be boundaries on the types of interaction that happens between them, and that any discussions should focus on the student's learning, even when discussing personal matters.

## **5.5 Student-Teacher Relationships**

### **5.5.1 Caring Teachers**

The notion of a caring teacher came out strongly throughout all the themes, which indicates that this issue is an important factor that influences students' retention and engagement in this context. This theme has been informed by the literature which explored the importance of the care factors involved in student learning that can enhance students' intrinsic motivation (Komarraju et al., 2010). Komarraju et al. found factors such as: a) respect, b) connectedness and c) care were important features of a positive teacher-student interaction. Interested and caring teachers who try to establish positive relationships with their students could make a positive difference for students at risk of leaving their institution (Jennings and Greenberg, 2009; Pianta and Allen, 2008). Other literature explored the importance of the care factors involved in student learning that can enhance students' intrinsic motivation (Komarraju et al., 2010). Fitzmaurice (2008) also supported Komarraju's view about the importance of the care factor in teacher-student interaction. Having a caring attitude is an essential aspect of the advisor's role in promoting student success (Ford and Ford, 2009). A retention study by Chickering and Gamson (1987) concluded that the most significant factor perceived by students to be a contributor to their retention was 'the caring attitude of faculty'.

A caring teacher who goes the extra mile in helping students was at the heart of most topics that were discussed by students. Having a caring attitude is an essential aspect of an advisor's role in promoting student success (Ford and Ford, 2009). Most students also highlighted the importance of building a positive relationship between the advisor and advisee. Having a caring attitude was also found to be an essential aspect of the advisor's role in promoting student success. Sultan (FG3) explained how his teacher helped him to overcome some difficulties he faced with some English language skills, such as writing. The retention study by Chickering and Gamson (1987) found that the caring attitude of faculty was the most significant factor perceived by students to be a contributor to their retention. The data presented here also reveal that students have high expectations of their teachers as a 'tool to their success'. The focus group students expected their teachers to be more than just subject teachers, which indicates the importance of promoting the role of the teacher as an academic advisor and a mentor, as well as a classroom teacher. For example, Talal (FG4) spoke about how a student can become negative and careless when his relationship with his teacher or advisor deteriorates. This view is supported by some researchers who called for the idea of treating advising as an 'administrative task' to be abandoned. Good advising should involve the building of long-lasting relationships that foster caring personal interactions between advisor and student 'client' (Crocker et al., 2014; Barbuto et al., 2011).

### **5.5.2 Formal Interaction**

The qualities of the college's academic advisors were heavily criticised by students in all the focus groups. Mubarak (FG3) spoke at length about his positive and negative academic advising experiences and how those affected his overall attitude towards the institution and his learning. Students were also concerned about their advisor's lack of knowledge and training regarding the advising procedures. Tariq (FG5) expressed his conditional satisfaction with his advisor but raised concerns about a particular shortcoming. The advisor was not familiar with the prescribed administrative procedures and often sent Tariq to



academic services who sent him back to the advisor to get answers to his queries as the academic services' personnel were too busy to deal with him. The students reported that their advisors were just assigned students to advise, but had not received any prior training. Frequently the students seeking advice would be referred to academic services when the supposed advisors were unsure about course mapping. This confusing situation led to high levels of student frustration, especially during the first few weeks of joining college. This concern has also been highlighted in the literature. Al Kandari's (2008) research at Kuwait University underlined the importance of developing staff skills and abilities for dealing with academic advising and for staff being knowledgeable about student-related regulations in various areas. Harrison (2009) has examined nursing students' perceptions of the characteristics and functions of productive academic advisors. The research revealed that the excellent qualities of advisors, such as their detailed knowledge of the programme requirements, are essential to the success of any academic advising process, regardless of the context. Similarly, Sutton and Sankar (2011) found that poor academic advising was a critical factor that contributed to increased student attrition in the sampled engineering programmes.

Focus group participants had opposing views as to who should conduct academic advising, with each group expressing a strong opinion. Focus Group 3 participants such as Mubarak, Omar and Sultan, who see their teachers relatively often, were in agreement that their teacher should be their advisor because s/he knows them well and can help them better than a teacher who doesn't know them as well or at all. Focus Group 5 teachers Zainab and Paul gave examples of the benefits of having the teacher as an advisor, based on their own experiences. Zainab (FG5) suggested that knowing the students would allow her to give the student valuable input. For Paul (FG5) it made sense that the teacher who sees the students the most should be their advisor. The members of Focus Group 4 were categorically against having their teachers as their advisors and gave various justifications for this view, such as lack of

access to their busy advisors and relationship issues with them. Salem (FG4) expressed concerns about having his teacher as an advisor while being in conflict for whatever reason with that teacher. Salem's preference was for administrative advisors who would be dedicated to advising only. The literature has also confirmed that there are multiple views as to who should conduct academic advising. Crocker et al. (2014) proposed an advising process model that focuses on faculty advising. Williamson et al. (2014) think that taking advising into the classroom and creating a strong partnership between faculty and student can provide support which promotes a student's wish for programme retention. However, other researchers such as Lowenstein (2015) suggested that the administrative adviser is better suited for this task than a faculty member because the non-academic adviser has regularly scheduled hours with the student at course selection and registration time. In light of what has been said about who should conduct academic advising, and taking into consideration the opposing students' views, it would be ideal to have a mixture of both. This solution could be achieved through assigning teachers as advisers and then supplementing them with some administrative advisers who would provide support to students, informed by those students' individual needs.

### **5.5.3 Informal Interaction**

Some students expressed concerns about instances of relationships breakdown and how that affected their motivation. They gave examples of how they are treated by some of their teachers in the classrooms. The occasional hostility towards students usually creates a rift and lack of interest during the classes of particular teachers. For example, Zayed (FG3) stated that the teacher should not make you 'hate learning' and Mubarak (FG3) said the teacher should not be harsh or act in an authoritarian manner. Thomas et al. (2011) referred to the importance of staff and students building and sustaining their ongoing relationships and dialogue. Abubaker (FG4) spoke about teachers building a barrier between them and their students which affected his motivation. Salem, from the same focus group, also spoke about

how a negative incident outside the classroom led to his decision not to talk to teachers outside class. Focus Group 2 participants, like Abdulaziz, also asked for action following the student-teacher evaluation, which is conducted once each semester; a process which gives students the opportunity to evaluate their teachers. Mubarak, (FG3) and Salem and Talal (FG4) also spoke at length about their poor relationships with some teachers. Their attitudes indicated that the role of the teacher could have adverse effects, especially if such conflicts are ignored. The negative effects of student-teacher relationship breakdowns have been widely discussed in the literature. Jennings and Greenberg, (2009), for example, found that disengaged students often lack positive relationships with their teachers, and are often likely to be in conflict with them.

Focus group students also spoke about how a good relationship with their teachers enhances their motivation and success. The literature has highlighted the significant role a good student-teacher relationship plays in ensuring good teaching and learning (Pennings et al., 2018). Bernstein- Yamashiro and Noam (2013) also highlighted the importance of a student's emotional wellbeing to his or her learning performance. Similarly, caring teachers who try to establish positive relationships with their students could also positively influence at-risk students' retention levels (Jennings and Greenberg, 2009; Pianta and Allen, 2008). Pascarella (1980) took the notion of student interaction to a different level by suggesting that students' informal interactions with faculty members could increase the level of their institutional commitment and help reduce the risk of dropout. A positive relationship between student and teacher is also important for student engagement and achievement (Roorda et al., 2011). Teacher-student relationships can and do play a significant role in ensuring good quality teaching and learning, an essential component in promoting student retention and success (Pennings et al., 2018).

Students and teachers were very vague about the meaning and impact of mentoring, but they recognised its importance after they were given examples of what it entailed. Paul

(FG6) commented that mentoring is a tough thing to measure as generally it is not quantifiable. This vagueness is also evident in the literature as mentoring is not widely researched, possibly due to flaws that are definitional, methodological and theoretical (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). The available literature tends to combine mentoring with teaching (McKinsey, 2016), with evidence about the effect of mentoring based primarily on surveys. The latter is an information-gathering model that has been criticised for lacking evidence about both its effect and reliability (Lloyd and Bristol, 2006; Zimmerman and Danette, 2007). In an attempt to address these matters, researchers started to understand the meaning of mentoring and explain how students experience mentoring in a higher education context (Crisp, 2010). The theoretical framework from Nora and Crisp (2007) which highlights how students perceive mentoring, contains forms of support that collectively form a holistic support system: a) psychological and emotional support; b) degree and career support; c) academic/subject knowledge support; and d) the presence of a role model. The focus group participants recognised that while mentoring is difficult to measure, it is beneficial to students as far as both their retention in college and their academic success are concerned. Paul (FG5) felt that mentoring was beneficial and that it could contribute positively to students' experiences. Zainab (FG5) thinks that mentoring could save students from mischief or 'getting out of line'. The research literature also reports significant learning benefits resulting from good mentoring (Lopatto, 2010), which further supports the view that mentoring has a great potential to support student retention, especially when done efficiently.

There is also very little research that measures the effect of mentoring on student retention in an academic programme (Crisp, 2010). However, earlier works such as those from Spady (1971), Tinto (1975), Pascarella and Terenzini, (1976) and Kuh and Hu, (2001) recognised the impact on retention of student-teacher interactions that took place outside the classroom. Paul (FG6) thinks it is difficult to assess how mentoring contributes to retention and success

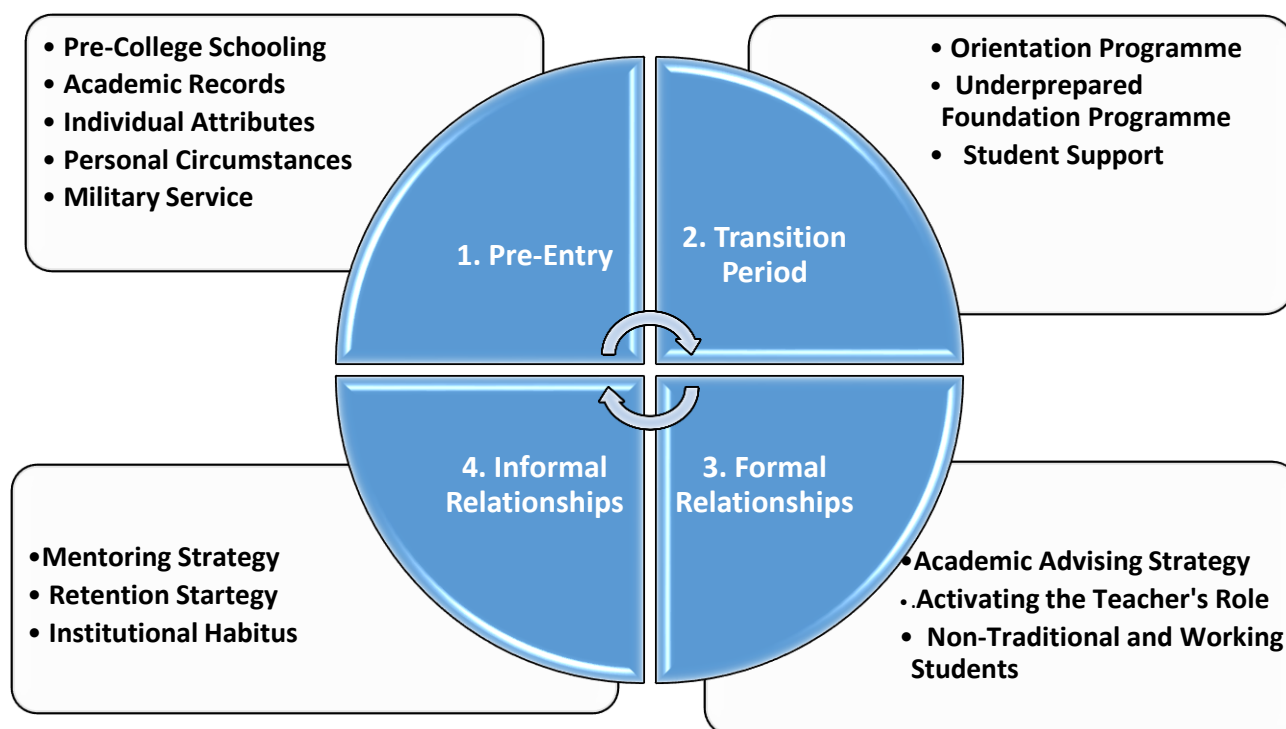
but recognises that it is a 'good thing'. Ray and Kafka (2014) also found students who are most engaged in their studies had mentors who encouraged them to pursue their aspirations. Despite the shortage of literature regarding research into the impact of mentoring on retention, there is enough evidence from the research data, and the little available research, to indicate that mentoring has been both underestimated and under-researched. It is appropriate to suggest that the issue and act of mentoring is a topic that deserves to receive significantly more attention. As is the case with academic advising, Focus Groups 3 and 4 expressed the need for ongoing access to mentors and were frustrated when their teachers did not have enough time to see them 'outside of the classroom'. McKinsey's (2016) suggestion of prioritising mentoring, based on the stage a student is at, as highlighted in the literature review, would probably resolve some of these issues.

To sum up, both the data and the literature confirm the imperative need for harmony between teachers and students in and outside their classrooms in order to promote retention and success. The main finding of the student-teacher relationship in this current research is the importance of the emotional aspect of this relationship, which is characterised by the caring attitude of the teacher towards the students. Good interpersonal relationships between students and teachers have also been found to positively affect students' successful adjustment across all age groups, including university level (Bernstein-Yamashiro and Noam, 2013; Roorda et al., 2011). The generalised meanings originate from perceptions of day-to-day interactions between a teacher and the student, which become the basis of their relationship. If that interaction is unfriendly, this could lead to a hostile relationship which may well hamper a student's progress (Hagenauer and Volet, 2014).

## **5.6 Context-Specific Theoretical Model**

Based on my research findings that emerged from the focus group discussions, and which were supported by the college records; as well as taking into consideration Tinto's (1975) theoretical model, I have designed a context-specific conceptual model which is illustrated

in Figure 6 below. The model incorporates Tinto's (1975) four stages of the student persistence process: i) pre-entry attributes, ii) the first-year transition experience, iii) formal relationships and iv) informal relationships.



**Figure 6: Context Specific Theoretical Model (Source: Self-Generated)**

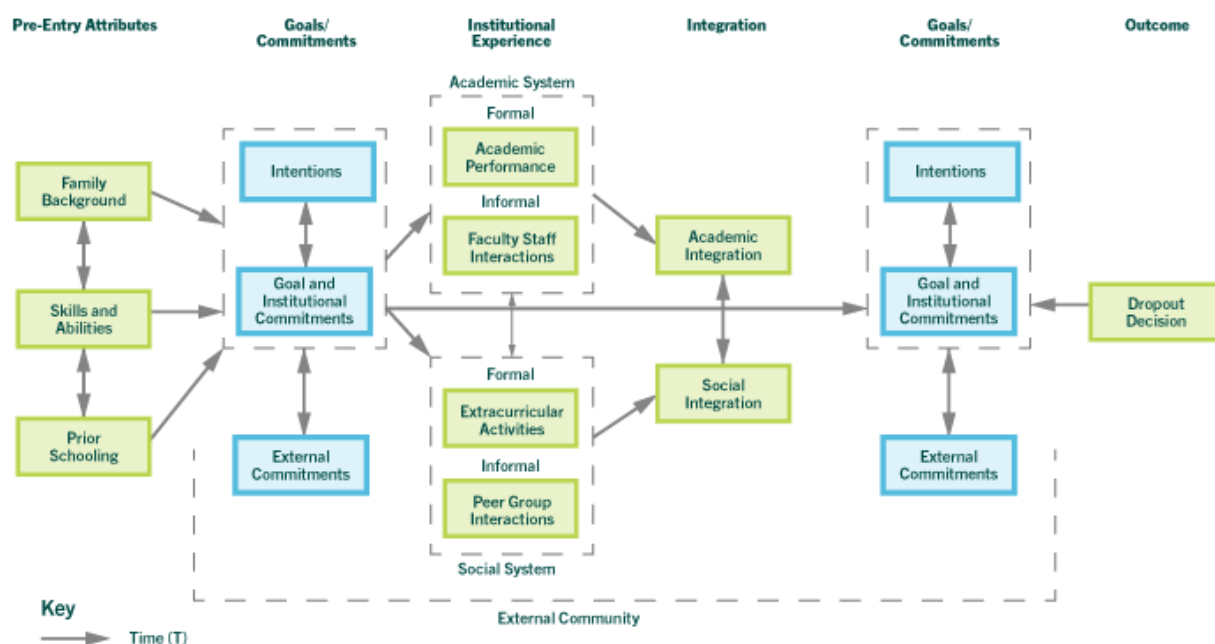
The model recognises that a retention strategy should have a mechanism for understanding pre-entry attributes (Pascarella, 1980; Tinto, 1993; Habley et al., 2012) that students bring with them to the institution, as well as how those attributes might affect their decisions to persist with their programme or drop out. The literature indicates that students in this context tend to lack the necessary soft skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and independent learning, which are essential components of enhancing retention and success (Crowe et al., 2008). It is no good blaming students or their schools for not providing students with those skills; instead, the college needs to give the students the opportunity to acquire those vital skills as part of the Foundation Programme. This goal could be achieved through a variety of pedagogical methods such as: i) promoting online learning, ii)

project-based learning and iii) oral presentations. The literature has revealed that early identification of at-risk students is also an important component of retention, as highlighted in Seidman's retention formula (Seidman, 2005). Since students do not come to college with a comprehensive report that outlines their academic and non-academic capabilities, using students' school grades to identify risk factors would be beneficial. Once at-risk students have been identified, an early intervention mechanism is then needed. This intervention could be through a robust remedial programme that bridges the knowledge gap students might have, in terms of what they learnt at school or home, and what they are expected to know in order to function in a tertiary education institution. For example, the Foundation Programme could be enhanced and restructured to include higher cognitive skills. This content focus issue was raised during the focus group discussions, which identified students needing: i) study skills, ii) problem-solving skills and iii) self-motivated independent learning skills.

Focus group participants, especially those in FG4 who did not go through the Foundation Programme, were very critical about their school-college transition period. It is suggested that connecting with students as early as when they make their choice to join the college, can promote their smooth transition from school to higher education, as well as their academic integration (Seidman, 2005). This early connection could be achieved by providing 'freshers' with informative websites and videos (as suggested by FG4 participants) about rules, regulations, advising, course registration and other aspects of college transition that prospective students would have to deal with or encounter. Conducting pre-entry interviews with each new student could also provide additional information that would help the institution to obtain prior knowledge about their students and how that information might affect their learning. It is also important that every student who joins the institution should go through an orientation programme before entering the classroom. Such an initiative would

ensure they had access to the necessary information they needed in order to deal with the transition period successfully. Most of these orientation materials could be accessed online.

The proposed model is linked to Tinto's Departure Model (1975) (see Chapter 2 above and Figure 7 below) in many respects: 1) the Pre-Entry segment of the proposed model is similar to Tinto's Pre-Entry Attributes which can have an impact on students' engagement and persistence; 2) although Tinto does not single out the Transition Period as an important factor, it is implicitly included in his concepts of Academic and Social Integration which need to be addressed as early as possible. The proposed model specifically introduces the Transition Period to underline the importance of this time period to students' retention; 3) the segments labelled Formal and Informal Relationships within the proposed model reflect the areas identified as the Academic System under Tinto's Institutional Experience, but stress the importance of the role of the teacher.



**Figure 7: Tinto's (1975) Departure Model**

By applying this model, one can only aim to reduce the incidence of attrition, rather than eliminate it; in other words, regardless of the context, attrition will always exist. It is here to stay because sometimes students leave for reasons that are beyond the institution's control,



such as the student's health. Therefore it is argued that a successful retention strategy should be judged on the degree of containing and reducing the attrition that it manages to achieve.

## **Chapter 6 - Recommendations and Conclusions**

### **6.1 Challenges and Opportunities**

This investigation has found that students in this particular socio-cultural context attach profound meaning to their relationship with their teachers; they were critical when their expectations vis-à-vis their teachers were not met. The implication suggested by such behaviour is that deterioration of contact with teachers tends to have negative repercussions on students' levels of retention and engagement. The data have revealed that the opposite applies when the relationship with teachers is positive and strong: students are motivated and likely to persist and succeed in their programmes. It is therefore recommended that the institution should develop a clear strategy to foster constructive student-teacher relationships which are based on trust, respect and care. The model provided in Chapter 5 (Figure 6) is a step in the right direction towards addressing shortcomings in the four areas that have been identified in this study as having a greater impact on first year students' retention: a) Pre-entry; b) Transition Period; c) Formal Relationships (including advising); and d) Informal Relationships (including mentoring).

Students in all the focus groups were critical about the first few weeks after they joined the college, especially when dealing with administrative issues related to course registration and academic advising. The current practice of assigning 40 advisees to each teacher advisor is having negative effects on the students and teachers alike. Students willingly and openly expressed their frustration about this unsatisfactory situation; one which was affecting their morale and wellbeing within the college. During the focus groups, students came up with some valuable recommendations, such as: a) having an administrative advisor/mentor who is dedicated to student support or b) reducing teachers' classroom loads, in order that students may gain greater access to teachers. In light of the fact that students value formal and informal access to teachers, and since teachers' workloads were reduced at the end of

the 2017/2018 academic year, it would be a good idea to incorporate time for advising and mentoring into teachers' schedules and official workloads. Thus, students could access their teachers outside the class, ideally in a location such as a library or even the cafeteria in order to make communication less formal, an idea that was particularly valued by focus group students. It could be made compulsory for first year at-risk students to attend at least three academic advising sessions and an equal number of mentoring sessions each semester. Figure 7 below provides a model which I have adapted from Fowler and Boylan (2010) (see Chapter 2) to address the issue of academic advising. This is a particularly suitable model because it addresses academic and non-academic factors of first year at-risk students.

While the institution has taken some positive steps to diversify teaching instructions by introducing sophisticated technology, as well as providing support for students through academic advising, the research data revealed that student mentoring as an official college strategy, does not exist. One can therefore conclude that the idea and implementation of mentoring remains a vague area that needs to be explored. There needs to be a clear strategy to activate this critical component of student support, whilst ensuring it is not confused with academic advising. Based on McKinsey's (2016) model of prioritising the timing and frequency of mentoring, I have produced the mentoring model shown in Figure 8 below which presents some strategies on how to address mentoring.

The institution needs to listen to the students' voices which can be expressed through platforms such as: a) focus groups, b) student satisfaction surveys, c) group and individual interviews, and d) activating the role of the student council. There was a very positive feeling amongst students who attended the focus groups for this study; they enjoyed being valued as partners within the institution, rather than just clients who come and go.

The college's existing quantitative data, as shown in the SENSE Survey (Appendix 12 and also Chapter 4) confirm areas that need improvement as far as student engagement is concerned. 27% of the students said they do not know what college facilities are available

to them; 17% said they are not getting an opportunity to know other students and 18% said they had not settled well in the first four weeks of college attendance. The institution's senior management is aware of this problem and has recently injected significant funds to improve the various college services and facilities. A new state of the art 'Online Learning Zone' (OLZ) has been developed, and the sports complex has undergone significant refurbishment. However, there needs to be a mechanism to make sure that these new facilities and resources are known to students; perhaps by organising site visits during orientation days, for example. Starting from the autumn term 2017, the college library has been replaced by an innovative learning space where students can engage in learning by doing activities and taking part in social events. These are some of the measures the college system has implemented to keep abreast of the latest innovative ideas that are designed to promote an attractive environment that meets the aspirations of the younger generation.

## **6.2 At-Risk Students**

There is a need to address issues that are hindering some at-risk students from completing the Foundation Programme (or specialist English and/or Maths classes) within the allocated year. Most of these problems are embedded in the schooling system experienced by such students; a system that does not prepare them well for higher education. The Ministry of Education has already taken some measures to address its high school graduates' poor literacy and numeracy skills. The recent employment of 700 highly qualified English native teachers across all schools in the country is an example of these measures. The Foundation Programme has tried to address the needs of the very weak students by introducing more contact hours, but the results are still less than satisfactory.

Based on the institution's existing data from the 2015-2016 academic year, only 38 out of 580 students (7%) who enrolled in Level 1 Foundation English, across the 17 colleges, progressed to their majors by meeting the IELTS requirements after two semesters. Furthermore, the number of Level 1 students who reached the requirements increased to only

88 students (15%) by the end of the one-year timeframe. These results clearly indicate that the majority of these high-risk students are set for failure right from the start, which necessitates an honest review of the institution's vision and mission. It would seem evident that the college cannot have maximum numbers, maximum retention and maximum success all at the same time (Smith and Beggs, 2003). Besides, student persistence is not necessarily always a good thing because if students persist but then fail to graduate, this represents a loss both for themselves and society (Thomas, 2012). If the institution commits itself to be the leading education provider in the country for all nationals, regardless of their levels of ability, it is vital that this 'open access to all' is strengthened with opportunities to succeed. After all, access without support does not represent an opportunity (Engstorm and Tinto, 2008). The Foundation Division in its new format should review its current practices. Action plans should be developed and implemented to improve level 1 students' success rates by introducing other programmes which can be taught partly in Arabic, for example. For reasons of ethical and social responsibility it is justifiable to ask that if a student was admitted because the institution thought a candidate had the chance to succeed, the college must take the necessary steps to help that student to do so (Thomas, 2012).

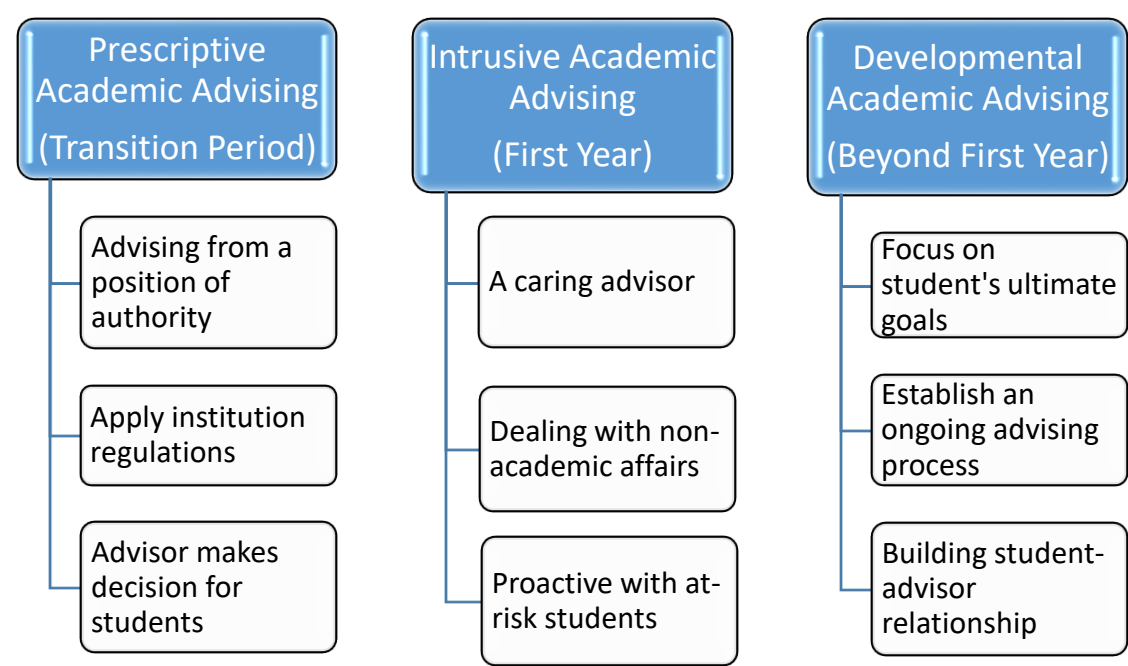
### **6.3 Academic Advising Model**

Building on this work, and as part of the college's development of an effective retention strategy, as well as enhancing the contribution of the teacher to student success, there is an urgent need to develop an institution-wide approach to academic advising. This approach model should involve criteria for identifying students who are at-risk. Faculty members who are acting as the academic advisors will require a comprehensive, system-wide training policy and guidelines to assist them in conducting their duties professionally and effectively. There is also a need to analyse and identify the students to be allocated and assigned to each advisor; a role ideally filled by a faculty member who is on a reduced schedule that incorporates and acknowledges the time dedicated to academic advising. There should also

be a strict advisor/advisee ratio, which should not exceed 20 students; to replace the current ratio of 40 students per advising teacher. This suggestion is informed by the opinions of Focus Group 5 teachers and their Focus Group 3 students who stated the Foundation Programme's experience of having an average of 20 students per teacher worked because the student clients met their teachers more frequently. Time should also be allocated to teachers as part of their weekly schedules if this approach is to be effective. This strategy could be achieved through coordination between the various programme departments and academic services. A policy should be designed that identifies at-risk students and develops a unified system-wide mechanism that guarantees the implementation and monitoring of student advising (Drake, 2011). This tool should: a) measure the impact of teacher advising on each student's academic progress, b) improve their retention and progression and c) ensure consistency of the advising techniques across the campus.

Based on McCabe (2003), (see Chapter 2) I propose the model shown in Figure 7 below, which incorporates McKinsey's (2016) concept of mentoring students during the stages they are at, during their tertiary studies, and applying that concept to academic advising. Prescriptive academic advising can target students during their transition period, where the advisor makes decisions for them to reduce some of the concerns and problems they face. This approach was suggested by participants from Focus Groups 4 (students), 5 and 6 (teachers), by providing additional academic advisors whose roles would be advising only. Maybe these appointees could be allocated to students who are at a higher risk, like underprepared students and the first-year in general. Developmental academic advising is suitable beyond the first year, as the advisor starts to build an ongoing relationship with students and begins outlining their ultimate goals. Thirdly, intrusive advising would be ideal once students complete the first semester in college; it could then extend beyond that to include their remaining study years. After all, if the institution wishes to remain as the 'institution of choice' in this country, it needs to invest in providing adequate resources to

address students' needs. By meeting those needs, the college will enhance the levels of students' retention and success, which are essential components enhancing the college's reputation.



**Figure 8: Academic Advising Strategy (Source: Self-generated)**

The knowledge obtained during this investigation has resulted in several academic advising presentations which were conducted during management and staff meetings. Following these presentations, all students in the Foundation Programme are now receiving at least one academic advising session per term, which is documented through portal comments in the college website as evidence that these sessions have taken place. Previous to this, it was left up to the teachers to advise their students if they wished to do so. Further advising sessions in excess of one per term are now conducted and also documented for at-risk students. During the 2016/2017 Foundation audit, our college was chosen to provide evidence of how academic advising is conducted. Documented evidence was presented, which included portal comments that were posted for some students. The choice of this institution represents recognition of the excellent practice found in our college.

## 6.4 Student Mentoring Model

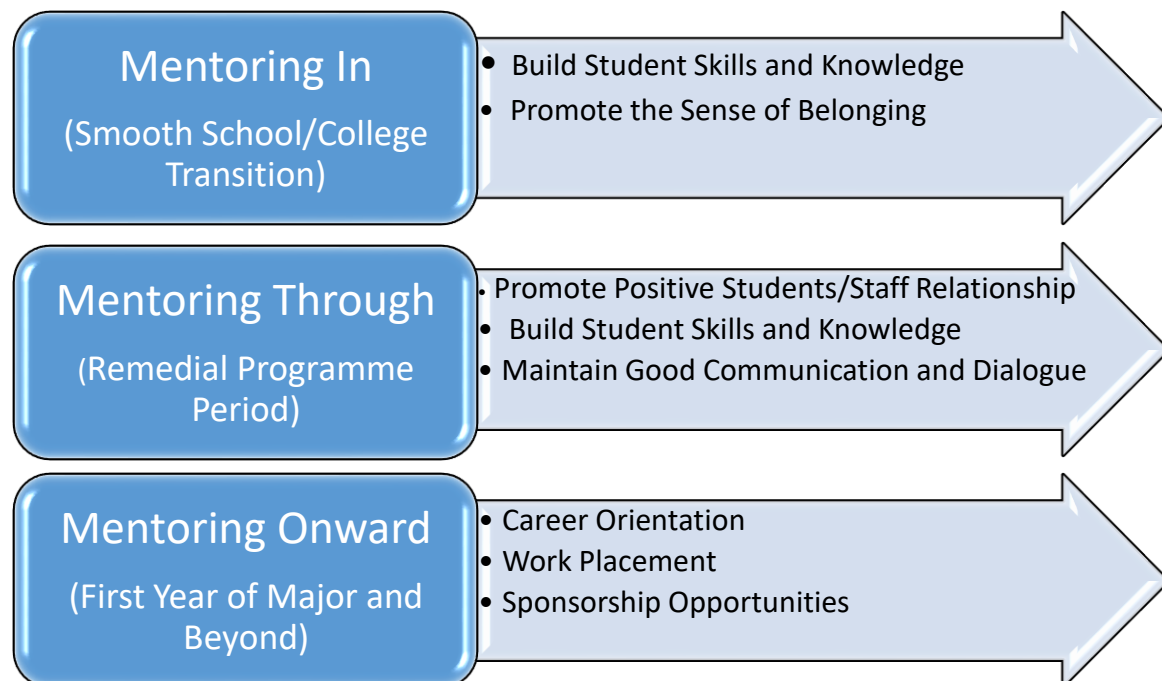
There is enough evidence in the literature to indicate that mentoring is an essential component in the promotion of student retention. The available research recognises the important influence of mentoring on student persistence and success, as well as a range of other student outcomes such as: i) performance, ii) critical thinking skills, iii) student self-confidence, iv) expectations and future aspirations, and v) grade point average, as highlighted in Chapter 2 (Sorrentino, 2006; Lopatto, 2010; McKinsey, 2016). Based on this literature evidence and the fact that the focus group participants in this study were confused about the nature of mentoring within their institution, I recommend exploring the opportunity of investing in a college-wide mentoring strategy that incorporates these current research findings.

McKinsey's (2016) model of prioritising the timing and frequency of mentoring could be the backbone of such a strategy. McKinsey suggests that the content of the mentoring session and the time spent should depend on the stage the student is at during their studies. The first stage, which she called "Mentoring In" (McKinsey, 2016 p.4), can focus on mentoring new students during their adjustment period by addressing issues such as: a) student life, b) college standards and c) the skills required to succeed; bearing in mind that this is the period where the risk of attrition is at its highest (Wintre and Yaffe, 2000). The second stage of mentoring is "Mentoring Through" (McKinsey, 2016 p.4) that focuses on helping students to acquire and apply more advanced skills, gain confidence, and begin to achieve independence in their work. The practices that exist in the first year Foundation Programme seem to be effective according to students in Focus Group 3 and their teachers (Focus Group 5). Many of these practices would be considered under the umbrella of mentoring in other contexts. These practices could be developed and applied to include other students in the various programme disciplines. Students and teachers of the focus groups were sometimes confused about what is meant by mentoring and what is meant by informal interaction; hence



the terms were used interchangeably, which was not helpful. This confusion also exists in the literature, as highlighted in Chapter 2 (McKinsey, 2016). Specific mentoring sessions on a one-to-one basis should be set up for at-risk students.

The third level of mentoring is 'Mentoring Onward' (McKinsey, 2016 p.5) which involves: a) looking ahead to life after college, and b) considering alternatives for jobs and careers after graduation. This third stage entails working closely with other stakeholders such as the 'careers' and 'work placement' departments. McKinsey (2016) suggested that mentoring should become the fourth category for faculty evaluation in addition to: i) teaching, ii) research, and iii) service, which are required to inform salary and promotion decisions. In turn, I suggest that the service category should include service to students through mentoring, academic advising and informal interaction. It would require a great deal of resources to deliver a one-to-one mentoring programme that meets the students' needs in an informal or natural setting; especially when most education institutions are trying to cut costs and are, to a certain extent, ranked by the amount of research they undertake. I am sure that if all educational institutions were to honour their mission and vision statements, they would realise that student mentoring should be at the heart of what they do to meet their visionary goals.



**Figure 9: Student Mentoring Strategy (Source: Self-generated)**

I also recommend that the college in this study should be selective in who should be a mentor. Judging from the characteristics frequently raised by focus group participants, only teachers who are: i) caring, ii) knowledgeable, iii) supportive and iv) dedicated to supporting students should be selected as mentors. However, institutions also need to have meaningful incentives in place for such dedicated teachers; reducing their workload and giving them additional financial allowance are two such suggestions. Ideally, students should have access to mentoring whenever they need it, but this option is not always possible, especially in my context where all faculty have at least 20 teaching hours per week. Such a load leaves those staff with little time to meet the students' mentoring needs. One solution would be to allocate mentoring hours for teachers, as part of their schedule. This responsibility could be combined with academic advising in its broader sense, which is not just limited to advising students about programme offerings but also addresses their personal and non-academic needs. This model of advising is highlighted in Fowler and Boylan's (2010) 'intrusive academic advising' approach. Recently, my institution reduced the number of weekly work hours from

40 to 30 so teachers could dedicate time for research and scholarly activities: a quantitative gesture designed to help increase its rankings. It would be beneficial if some of this time were to be dedicated to mentoring, primarily because mentoring promotes student academic success.

## **6.5 Shortcomings of the Research**

Before embarking on this research journey, I had made various assumptions about the outcome of this investigation. I was under the impression that the leading cause of attrition was motivation, and that students were mainly to blame for their lack of persistence. After engaging with the literature, I realised that the situation was far more complex than my original perception, as students leave their tertiary education programmes for a wide range of reasons (Bean, 2005; Sanders et al., 2016). Through the literature I learnt about the importance of social and academic integration in influencing persistence and success (Tinto, 1993; Terenzini and Pascarella, 1980; Braxton et al., 2000). Before conducting the focus group meetings, I applied Mills' idea (2011) of listing the anticipated topics that could emerge out of the discussions. Therefore, I listed items that were related to, or informed by, college rules and regulations, attendance and the academic demands of the programme. In addition, I also identified other external personal issues such as employment and financial difficulties, all of which emerged during the focus group discussions. However, I was surprised to see how passionate students were about such matters as their relationships with their teachers (Pascarella, 1980; Thomas, 2011). Even when they were asked about different areas, they constantly linked the observation to their teachers.

The Western approach to retention does not always apply to this case study's context. Our retention rates far exceed any in the West (OECD, 2019), and it is possible that the methods discussed in this thesis would not apply to female students due to the cultural differences within this context. The institution under investigation is adjacent to a women-only 'sister' institution, where student retention is less of an issue than in the college being studied. The

higher retention rates in women's campuses are partly attributed to the fact that females have fewer employment opportunities than men in this region, a fact that is now rapidly changing. However, there is also the belief that the women's institution is being viewed by its female students as a social opportunity to meet and interact with other girls instead of staying at home, as opposed to an educational opportunity. Also, the social concept of young women trying to evade early marriage makes them more inclined to seek an escape within the institution's walls (Quinn, 2003). I appreciate that this view of women in our countries, and others in the Middle East, is very different from the view of women in the Western world, where going to university is as important for women as for men in terms of career and equal life opportunities. Future research projects should look at current educational provision for women in this part of the world, alongside the rapidly changing attitudes towards education and employment for women, and carry out comparative studies to investigate reasons why retention rates are higher amongst women than men.

On the whole, there is a need for a comprehensive approach to retention across all 17 colleges in this institution in order to address the student body as a united whole (Harvey et al., 2006). To achieve these goals, the institution would benefit from conducting a large scale project similar to the 'What Works?' initiative. This initiative was carried out in the UK by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, in partnership with the Higher Education Academy, Action on Access and 13 universities across 43 discipline areas (Thomas et al., 2017) as discussed in Chapter 2. The programme examined what works regarding retention and success and as a result developed a good understanding of how to implement change in complex higher education institutions. One of the key findings of the UK research programme was the effectiveness of on-going interventions on student success rates, as opposed to one-off interventions. Academic advising and mentoring are good examples of ongoing interventions. In its final report (Thomas et al., 2017), the 'What Works?' initiative highlighted the importance of a system-wide approach that involves all departments and services striving to improve

retention and success. Highlighted was the critically important role of research and evidence-based recommendations. I have initiated the idea of conducting evidence-based research initiative similar to the 'What Works?' project but focusing on areas that are specific to this socio-cultural geographical region. The current student success initiatives are composed of a handful of uncoordinated individual efforts that lack coherence and cohesion regarding the institution's vision and mission. The need for a system-wide approach in an institution like ours, that aims to be the primary higher education provider in the country and the best in the region, will require initiatives such as the 'What Works?' project cited above.

## **6.6 Further Research**

Following this investigation, several areas have been identified as worthy of future research and publication. These include military service, employment, family issues and special needs and how these affect students' education.

Students in the focus group spoke about the effects of the one-year military service, which is now extended to 18 months. Students talked about how military service negatively affected their learning, particularly regarding the absence of spoken English during this period. At the same time, teachers spoke about the positive impact on students who had carried out military service, compared to those students who had not. As military service is currently compulsory in this part of the world and taking into consideration the fact that students felt that this gap period affected their studies, it would be beneficial if there were to be a liaison process between the Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Defence to explore avenues of addressing students' educational needs during their time of military service. For example, introducing English literacy or English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classes during the period of the military service could prove beneficial to all. Such proposals would be strengthened by empirical research into the area, with funding sought from the appropriate research bodies.

Employment while studying was highlighted in the literature as a possible cause for students' academic failure. Sullivan and Nielsen, (2013) found that some students fail academically due to a multitude of reasons such as: i) illness, ii) family problems, iii) employment demands, iv) attendance and v) motivation. Bye et al. (2007) also stated that non-academic factors such as employment can interfere with successful completion of educational objectives. Riggert et al. (2006) referred to student employment as 'an educational fact of life'. Hovdhaugen (2009) also identified 'employment while studying' as the most commonly cited reason for academic attrition.

The available quantitative college data also highlight the significance of the employment issue as the primary contributor to student attrition. The existing college quantitative data (Appendix 13) indicate that employment is one of the main reasons for student dropout. The burden of this issue was cited by 53% of the student leavers in semester 1, 2013/2014 and 20% in semester 2, 2015. The figures shown in Appendix 13 indicate that being in full-time employment, or needing to look for a job, is a common issue not just for the college under investigation, but for all the colleges across the system. In semester 1 of the academic year, 2014/2015 employment-related issues were the cause of 175 students having left across all colleges; 40 were from the college featured in this research.

A number of the participants from this study mentioned employment and other family issues as factors that affect their studies. However, there is insufficient data reflecting these two sub-themes and therefore firm conclusions cannot be drawn here with regard to the role that employment and family issues might play in affecting students' retention. Nevertheless, it is clear from the literature referred to above that these areas are worth investigating in future.

Students with special educational needs are a population that need particular attention, especially in this part of the world. As stated in the literature review (see section 2.3 'Underprepared Students' above), this country has committed itself to an 'access for all' policy under the slogan 'No student should be left behind'. Unfortunately, some students

with special needs tend to be left behind, mainly because the college lacks the resources and expertise to cater for their needs. Students on the autistic spectrum, for example, are often integrated in large main stream classrooms with no additional support or provision. Fowler and Boyden (2010) and Malik (2011), as referred to above, emphasise the importance of addressing non-academic factors and this is particularly vital in my context where the needs of students with particular education requirements are not addressed and have not been researched. Given this gap in knowledge, in the research and in the literature within this field, it is essential that future research focus on this important sector of the population. It is not possible for this part of the world to truly claim that in higher education ‘No student should be left behind’ until such time that data are collected to represent all sectors of the student population. Thus, research into engaging and retaining students with special educational needs in this part of the world would be a step in the right direction towards raising awareness about the need to provide the necessary support and provision for this group of learners.

Finally, due to the shortage of literature in the field of retention and student engagement in the context of the Middle East, my primary goal is to carry out further research regarding student retention, to publish papers on the topic and present my findings at international as well as regional conferences. The institution researched for this study is keen to send presenters to the upcoming First-Year Engagement Conference and I have already been encouraged by my line manager to start preparing a research paper for inclusion at that event.

## **6.7 Contributions to the Institution**

When I embarked on this research my predominant goal was to engage in an investigation that would make a substantial contribution to the institution under study. As a result of this inquiry, the following practical steps have been taken. Knowing and understanding this research topic and reflecting upon it, I have been able to modify my practice and the practice of other staff in the sister institutions within the college system by providing them with: a)

research evidence, b) examples of effective practice relating to student retention, c) encouragement and support for change and d) staff training. Although this research has taken place in just one of the eight male colleges that are spread throughout the country, the results and recommendations of this study can be generalised to the remainder of these male colleges because their student intake is very similar: all students are nationals of this country, the foundation curriculum is the same across all colleges, and students follow a similar schooling system prior the college entry.

Following my active involvement at the college and institutional level in the field of student retention and engagement through the various workshops and training sessions I have conducted, I was tasked with leading the organising committee of the first system-wide Foundation conference in April 2017. The conference was a great opportunity for the Foundation faculty members from all 17 campuses, together with guests from national colleges and universities, to exchange knowledge and skills in the area of student success at tertiary level in this country. It was also an opportunity to celebrate ‘research in action’ as we explored together how current teaching and learning methodologies are preparing students for their future studies and careers. Enough time was allocated for representatives to network with each other and known publishers in the field; English Central and Cambridge University Press were invited to share their products. A keynote speaker was invited from the UK who delivered highly interactive and collaborative knowledge sharing sessions on experiential learning. Learning communities emerged as a result of this conference, such as the student retention committee, and the research committee. One of the highlights of the conference was the panel discussion forum that I initiated as part of promoting the idea of focus groups to a broader audience. During this session, which was video recorded, existing and previous Foundation students were able to share their experiences of being in the programme. The student panel discussion, which was an initiative



inspired by this research investigation, was well-attended and received very positive feedback.

Following the success of the first conference, I also led the organising committee of a regional conference (Middle East) in spring 2019 addressing the topic of engaging the first year undergraduate students. Over 400 participants attended the conference. The 2019 conference was a great success as it helped raise awareness about aspects involved in engaging at-risk students. The breakout sessions covered topics such as: a) advisor training, b) students with particular needs, c) the first year experience and d) other topics related to student retention and first-year student engagement. International expert guest speakers were invited to broaden the knowledge of our teachers and the management about aspects of engaging and retaining first-year students. I am pleased to report that as a result of my contribution, teachers and academic staff are now more informed and aware of the topic of student engagement and retention, and how their roles impact student persistence and success. The good practice that has been referred to above is ongoing and further initiatives with respect to retention are being explored.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1 - OU HREC Approval

Dear Mokhtar

This message confirms that the research protocol for the following research project, as submitted for ethics review, has been given a favourable opinion on behalf of The Open University Human Research Ethics Committee.

**Project title: Retention of At-Risk Students: A Case Study from a Tertiary Education Institution in the Middle East.**

**HREC approval date: 15/03/2019**

As part of your favourable opinion, it is essential that you are aware of and comply with the following:

1. You are responsible for notifying the HREC immediately of any information received by you, or of which you become aware which would cast doubt on, or alter, information in your original application, in order to ensure your continued safety and the good conduct of the research.
2. It is essential that you contact the HREC with any proposed amendments to your research, for example - a change in location or participants. HREC agreement needs to be in place before any changes are implemented, except only in cases of emergency when the welfare of the participant or researcher is or may be affected.
3. Your HREC reference number has to be included in any publicity or correspondence related to your research, e.g. when seeking participants or advertising your research, so it is clear that it has been agreed by the HREC and adheres to OU ethics review processes.
4. Researchers should have discussed any project-related risks with their Line Manager and/or Supervisor, to ensure that all the relevant checks have been made and permissions are in place, prior to a project commencing, for example compliance with IT security and Data protection regulations.
5. Researchers need to have read and adhere to relevant OU policies and guidance, in particular the Ethics Principles for Research with Human Participants and the Code of Practice for Research - <http://www.open.ac.uk/research/ethics/>

## Appendix 2 - Ethics Application Form

HUman RESEARCH ethics committee (HREC)

Application form

All OU research involving human participants or materials requires assessment by the [HREC](#).

Where you have determined your research requires a full review or you have completed the [HREC Project Registration and Risk Checklist](#) and been advised that will need to complete this form as part of the [full review process](#), please complete and email this form to [Research-REC-Review@open.ac.uk](mailto:Research-REC-Review@open.ac.uk). Attach any related documents, for example: a consent form, information sheet, questionnaire, or publicity leaflet to ensure that the HREC Review Panel has everything they need to carry out a full review. If there are more than one group of participants, relevant documents for each research group need to be included.

If you have any queries about completing the proforma please check the Research Ethics website, in particular the FAQs - <http://www.open.ac.uk/research/ethics/human-research/faqs> which include sample documents and templates, or email [Research-REC-review@open.ac.uk](mailto:Research-REC-review@open.ac.uk).

The deadline for applications is **every Thursday by 5.30pm**. Applications are then sent to the HREC Review Panel with a minimum response time of 21 working days. However, the process can take a month or longer, so when planning your research and ethics application, you need to build in sufficient time for the HREC review to avoid any delays to your research. Particularly, when you are planning overseas travel or interviews with participants as it is essential that no potential participants are approached until your research has been fully assessed by the HREC.

**Please complete all the sections below – deleting the instructions in italics.**

## **Project identification and rationale**

### **1. Title of project**

**Retention of At-Risk Students: A Case Study from a Tertiary Education Institution in the Middle East.**

---

### **2. Abstract**

*A summary of the main points of the research, written in terms easily understandable by a non-specialist and containing no complex technical terms (maximum 200 words).*

This study investigates the retention of a group of students who are at-risk of failing their first year courses and hence are unable to access their program discipline. The study takes place in a government-funded tertiary education institution in the Middle East. An interpretive method of inquiry is adopted in this study, which is conducted through a qualitative case study. Focus groups is the method used for conducting this research. The research aims to investigate the role of the teacher in the following areas:

The impact of academic advising and mentoring in retaining students.

The formal and informal role of the teacher in student retention and success.

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## **Project personnel and collaborators**

### **3. Investigators**

*Give names and institutional attachments of all persons involved in the collection and handling of individual data and name one person as Principal Investigator (PI).*

*Research students should name themselves as PI and include a supervisor's electronic*

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*signature and/or comments (below) as evidence of supervisor support. Without this the application cannot be processed.*

Principal Investigator/  
(or Research Student):

Mokhtar Bouchak (Research Student)

Other researcher(s):

N/A.

**For students only:**

Please note that this application cannot be processed without your supervisor's signature and/or supporting comments which should be provided below ([Research ethics review: guidance for research students and supervisors](#)):

Postgraduate research degree: EdD

Personal identifier

B8721435

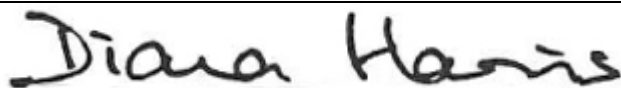
Supervisor (preferably primary):

Diana Harris

Email

[d.harris@open.ac.uk](mailto:d.harris@open.ac.uk) ;

Supervisor's electronic  
signature:



Supervisor's supporting comments:

I approve of this research.

#### 4. Schedule

Time frame for the research and its data collection phase(s):

From: March 2019

To: March, 2020

Earliest date participants will be contacted: March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

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#### 5. Methodology

*Outline the method(s) that will be employed to collect and analyse data. Any relevant documents, such as interview or survey questions or a participant information sheet, should be sent with the completed proforma. Where there are more than one group of participants, please provide separate consent forms and participant information sheets. If, for any reason, any of this is not possible please explain why.*

The primary data collection method is generated through focus group meeting(s) of students who are at-risk of leaving the institution before accessing their program discipline. Teachers' focus group(s) will also be conducted to address areas related to the role of the teacher as mentioned above. NVivo software will be used to analyse the data of the focus groups to identify themes that are relevant to the research questions.

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#### 6. Participants

*Give details of the population targeted or from which you will be sampling and how this sampling will be done. Give information on the diversity of the sample.*

All students are 18 years of age or over. They are all male, attending an all-male college. All students are Arab national of the country where the study is taking place. Teachers will be chosen randomly following expressing an interest in this study, but I expect that there will be a mixture of different nationalities with some native and non-native speakers of English.

Participants will be chosen randomly, but I will work out if a booster sample is needed if certain representatives are needed. Example a range of monolingual and Arabic bilingual teachers.

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## **7. Recruitment procedures**

*Give details of how potential participants will be identified and approached. Also any possibility of coercion or conflict of interest and how this will be addressed. For example, where the participants are known to the researcher either personally or professionally.*

An announcement will be made through a class visit and/or during a regular monthly assembly to invite willing students to take part in this study. Teachers will be sent an email inviting them to participate.

All teachers will be known to me as they are colleagues at work. All participating students know me but I don't necessarily know them. As stated in the information sheets, participants will be reminded that this research is for a doctorate study and has no impact on teacher's evaluation or students' grades. Only participants who express an interest by replying to an email will be approached further to take part.

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## **8. Recompense to participants**

*Give details of any recompense which will be offered to research participants or volunteers, e.g. a small payment or gift voucher. Participants should not be disadvantaged so it is usual to compensate them for their time, although it should not be considered a benefit or inducement. More guidance is available in [FAQ 12](#).*

The research will benefit the institution in helping current and future students by understanding their issues and taking into consideration their feedback and recommendation to improve the standards of at risk students. Participants will be provided with refreshments and snacks to help create a relaxing atmosphere but will not be otherwise recompensed. Focus groups will take place during college hours and participants are not being asked to give up their private time for the research.

## **9. Consent**

*Provide information on how valid consent will be sought from participants and attach copies of information sheet(s) and consent form(s). See [FAQ 13](#) and [FAQ 14](#) for guidance and templates.*

*Consent forms and/or information sheets **have** to include the following or a rationale as to why not:*

*Contacts; the PI and an alternative contact, e.g. Head of Department or supervisor, with respective OU email addresses.*

*Clear information on how and when a participant may withdraw from the research. This should include a date or timeframe so it is clear that after the data gathering phase, when data may have been anonymised, it may not be possible to withdraw.*

*Separate forms for each participant group - where applicable*

*Information on how research data will be stored and disseminated/published and destroyed or retained (also see the [OU data retention policy](#) – internal link).*

Following the initial announcement which will be done through email for teachers and an assembly announcement for students, interested participants will be asked to sign a consent form. Please see attached consent form for both students and teachers.

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#### 10. Location(s) of data collection

*Give details of where and when data will be collected, with an explanation of why the research needs to be conducted in the chosen setting or location. If it will take place on private, corporate or institutional premises, indicate what approvals are gained/required.*

The data will be collated within the college premises. The college interview room which has conformable chairs and ideal equipment for recording will be used. Refreshments will be provided. This room is suitable because it is in a quiet area with limited access as prior booking is required. A meeting sign will be placed outside the room to avoid disruptions.

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#### 11. Literature review

*Provide a brief review of the existing literature or previous research. Clarify whether the proposed study replicates prior work and/or duplicates work done elsewhere and/or has an element of originality (maximum 200 words).*

The research addresses four main areas about the impact of the teacher in retaining at-risk students and enhancing their success, the formal and informal role of the student-teacher interaction as well as the role of the teacher as a mentor and an academic advisor. Previous research data revealed that students in this sociocultural part of the world attach a lot of meaning to their relationship with

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teachers and this has a great impact in their persistence success. There is very little research in the Middle East region about the role of the teacher in student retention so this study will aim to add value to the research field. Tinto's internationalist model will be used as guide in highlighting the importance of students' social and academic integration in retaining students.

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## **Key Ethics considerations**

### **12. Published ethics and legal guidelines to be followed**

*Detail which guidelines will be followed by the researchers.*

*For example: BERA, BPS, BSA, SRA, MRS, SPA, UK Evaluation Society (see [FAQ 5](#) on the Research Ethics website for more information).*

The institution under study and The Open University ethical guidelines will be followed which are also in alignment with the BERA guidelines.

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### **13. Data protection and information security**

*If your research involves the collection of information about individuals, you need to be aware of and follow the Data Protection Registration process - please confirm that this has been done (see [FAQ 7](#)).*

*Also, re: storage and disposal of data, you need to detail below the procedures and schedule (including dates) you will be following. Indicate the earliest and latest date for the destruction of original data, where it is required, or any archiving arrangements that have been agreed/permitted, and ensure this is included in the project schedule. You should also be aware of OU information security policy and guidance (see [FAQ 8](#)).*

The data collected complies with the GDPR regulation, the process of collecting the data is lawful, fair and transparent. The collected data will be stored in a password protected area of a College server. The data will only be held for the duration of the research, will be used only for the purpose of the study and will be deleted in accordance with OU data retention rules once the research is completed.

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#### 14. Research data management, disseminating and publishing research outcomes

*If not covered elsewhere in your application, please give details of how your research data will be managed including publishing and data retention. It is recommended that all researchers applying to HREC write a Data Management Plan (DMP), and guidance and templates for writing a DMP are available on the [Library Research Support website](#), with links to OU Open Access and ORDO (Open Research Data Online). If you need further help contact the [Library Research Support team](#) and [FAQ 16](#) for links and guidance. Any funding body requirements should also be provided, e.g. the Economic Social Research Council (ESRC) requests data is deposited in a repository.*

The data will be used towards my Education Doctorate. At a later date, I might need to publish some of the data in renowned journal. Publishing quotations might be used but participants will not be identified.

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#### 15. Deception

*Give details of the withholding of any information from participants, or misrepresentation or other deception that is an integral part of the research. Any such deception should be fully justified.*

No information will be withheld from participants.

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## 16. Risk of harm

*Detail any foreseen risks to participants or researchers, e.g. home visits, and based on a risk assessment, the steps that will be taken to minimise or counter these. Consider the Lone working guidance ([FAQ 18](#)) and project risk assessment matrix ([FAQ 14](#)). If the proposed study involves contact with children or other vulnerable groups, you should comply with the OU Safeguarding policy and procedures [FAQ 10](#). Also, confirm that the requirements of the Disclosure and Barring Service have been met by providing the relevant reference number and period covered - for each person involved in the research.*

The research will not cause any risks or harm to the participants. However, the consent form will highlight the fact that other participants will hear their input during focus group discussions. Their names will also remain anonymous before, during and after the research is concluded. The focus groups will be held in college premises so I will not be at risk as a researcher.

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## 17. Debriefing

*Give details of how information will be given to participants after data collection to inform them of the outcomes of their participation and the research more broadly.*

The participants will be invited to share the findings of the research when it is concluded.

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## Project Management



## 18. Research organisation and funding

*Please provide details of the principal funding body (internal or external). If your project is part of a current or successful externally funded bid, enter your Award Management System (AMS) reference number below. For further guidance contact your Faculty Research Administrator (FRA) or refer to the [Research and Enterprise website](#) (internal site).*

Funding body: Self-funded.

AMS reference number: N/A

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## 19. Other project-related risks

*Indicate how research risks will be limited by detailing anticipated or potential problems. If you are carrying out fieldwork in the UK or overseas, you should be aware of the OU Fieldwork (FLD) travel advice and International Travel Risk webpages [FAQ 18](#) (internal link).*

No risks to be reported.

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## 20. Benefits and knowledge transfer

*State how the research may be of general benefit to participants and society in general (100 words maximum).*

The research will be a step in the right direction in assisting the institution which has recently started to explore ideas and strategies in understanding at-risk students. Academic advising was also initiated in the institution last year for addressing student retention. The institution is at a learning stage about the topic, this research will be a very beneficial in highlighting the impact of the teachers especially as students spend most of their college time in the classroom. After the research completion, I intend to

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provide a number of professional development sessions for teachers and management to raise awareness about the impact of the teacher's role on student retention and success.

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## 21. Supporting documents

*Include as attachments or appendices, any documents related to your research proposal. Add the HREC reference number to each (if already known), and list below, for example:*

Consent form and Participant information sheet – for each participant group	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Questionnaire	<input type="checkbox"/>
Email or letter from the organisation agreeing that the research can take place	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Draft bid or project outline	<input type="checkbox"/>
Publicity leaflet	<input type="checkbox"/>

## 21. Declaration

### **I declare that:**

The research will conform to the above protocol and that I will inform the HREC of any significant changes or new ethics issues and have these agreed before they are implemented.

I have read and will adhere to the following OU policy:

OU Code of Practice for Research - <http://www.open.ac.uk/research/ethics>

OU Ethics Principles for Research involving Human Participants - <http://www.open.ac.uk/research/ethics>

**Principal Investigator(s)**      **Mokhtar Bouchak**

**School/Unit/Faculty**      **Education**

**Telephone**      **(00971)0507967204**

**E-mail**      **mbouchak@hotmail.com**

**Signature(s)**

(scanned or electronic)



**Date**      **14 March 2019**

### **HREC Final report**

At the end of a HREC reviewed research project, Principal Investigators are required to assess their research for any ethics-related issues and/or major changes. Where these have occurred, the PI should return a completed copy of the [HREC final report form](#) to [Research-REC-Review@open.ac.uk](mailto:Research-REC-Review@open.ac.uk). Final reports are confidential and only made available to the HREC Chair and Committee members, and are requested to inform the HREC process, to assess how any ethics-related issues and major changes have been dealt with and to ensure OU research has been carried out as agreed. If you could add the date when your research is due to finish below, you will be sent a reminder.

**Proposed date for final report:    15 November 2019.**

NB. Research students should enter their end of research project date

## **Research ethics applications - collection and use of data**

To meet internal governance and highlight OU research, the titles of all projects considered by the HREC (either by HREC checklist or proforma) with HREC reference number, Faculty/dept. and HREC decision date, will be added to the Research Ethics website - <http://www.open.ac.uk/research/ethics/human-research>.

Information provided as part of a research ethics application, e.g. from research students or staff, is stored so the HREC has an accurate record. All data is managed and held securely by the [Research Ethics Administrative Team](#) and only shared with HREC members as part of the research ethics review process. Occasionally, and only where relevant, applications are discussed with like OU research review panels, e.g. the Staff Survey Project Panel (SRPP) and Staff Survey Project Panel (SSPP), predominately to avoid delays where applications are being made in tandem.

If, as part of a research ethics application sensitive personal data is disclosed, it will be stored securely and only shared as above. If such data is volunteered but then needs to be withdrawn, the researcher should contact [Research-REC-Review@open.ac.uk](mailto:Research-REC-Review@open.ac.uk). More information is available in the OU [Student privacy notice](#) and [Staff, workers and applicants privacy notice](#).

## **Appendix 3 - Participants Information Sheet – Students**



### **Human Research Ethics Committee**

#### **Research study participant information sheet template**

#### **Retention of At-Risk Students: A Case Study from a Tertiary Education Institution in the Middle East.**

Doctoral Study by Mokhtar Bouchak, supervised by Dr. Diana Harris and Dr. Liz Marr, The Open University, UK

12<sup>th</sup> March, 2019

Dear Student,

My name is Mokhtar Bouchak, and I am a doctoral student at The Open University, UK.

I am inviting you to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

This study investigates a retention is a case study of students at risk of withdrawing or being withdrawn. The aim of the research is to understand the factors which might contribute to student withdrawal in order to improve retention in the college. If you agree to participate in this study, you will take part in an audio-recorded focus group which will take a

maximum of 90 minutes, at a time and location that that will be communicated to you. A short break will be provided after the first 45 minutes. During this focus group I will ask questions about the impact of the areas listed below on student retention and success:

- Academic advising
- Student mentoring
- Student/teacher informal interaction
- Student/teacher formal interaction

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form. You will be free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason and any data collected from you will be deleted. Collected data that is retained will be stored in a password protected area of a college server. The data will only be held for the duration of the research, will be used only for the purpose of the study and will be deleted in accordance with local data retention rules. The study will benefit our college in understanding the impact of the above mentioned areas on the retention and success of at-risk students. You have the right to ask for your data to be removed after your participation in the study by sending me an email to the address shown below up until a month after the meeting.

I will be using pseudonyms for participants, and will not use any potentially identifying information in the doctoral thesis, and in the public dissemination of findings. Please note that choosing to either take part or not take part in the study will have no impact on your marks, assessments or future studies. If you are interested in participating, or if you have any further questions, I would be glad if you would contact me via email or phone as shown below.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Yours sincerely,

Mokhtar Bouchak

[mbourchah@hotmail.com](mailto:mbourchah@hotmail.com)

Phone: 050 - 7967204

## **Appendix 4 - Participants Information Sheet – Teachers**



### **Human Research Ethics Committee**

#### **Research study participant information sheet template**

#### **Retention of At-Risk Students: A Case Study from a Tertiary Education Institution in the Middle East.**

Doctoral Study by Mokhtar Bouchak, supervised by Dr. Diana Harris and Dr. Liz Marr, The Open University, UK

12<sup>th</sup> March, 2019

Dear Colleague,

My name is Mokhtar Bouchak, and I am a doctoral student at The Open University, UK.

I am inviting you to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

This study investigates a case study of students at risk of withdrawing or being withdrawn. The aim of the research is to understand the factors which might contribute to student withdrawal in order to improve retention in the college. If you agree to participate in this study, you will take part in an audio-recorded focus group which will take a

maximum of 90 minutes, at a time and location that that will be communicated to you. A short break will be provided after the first 45 minutes. During this focus group I will ask questions about the impact of the areas listed below on student retention and success:

- Academic advising
- Student mentoring
- Student/teacher informal interaction
- Student/teacher formal interaction

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form. You will be free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason; any data collected from you will be deleted. Retained collected data will be stored in a password protected area of a college server. The data will only be held for the duration of the research, will be used only for the purpose of the study and will be deleted in accordance with local data retention rules. The study will benefit our college in understanding the impact of the above mentioned areas on the retention and success of at-risk students. You have the right to ask for your data to be removed after your participation in the study by sending me an email to the address shown below up until a month after the meeting.

I will be using pseudonyms for participants, and will not use any potentially identifying information in the doctoral thesis, and in public dissemination of findings. Please note that choosing to either take part or not take part in the study will have no impact on your evaluation and progression at work. If you are interested in participating or if you have any further questions, I would be glad if you would contact me via email or phone as shown below.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Yours sincerely,

Mokhtar Bouchak

[mbourchah@hotmail.com](mailto:mbourchah@hotmail.com)

Phone: 050 – 7967204



## **Appendix 5 - Focus Group Questions – Students**

### **Focus Group Questions – Student**

**Informal Interaction:** To what extent do you have informal interaction with teaching staff, how has this contributed to your success during your first year of study? How could informal interaction with teaching staff be improved?

*Informal interaction refers to opportunities to discuss academic and non-academic matters with teachers, e.g. at the end of taught sessions, when you see them around campus, via email etc.*

- What types of informal interaction do you have with teachers? Can you give me some examples?
- In what ways do these informal interactions impact on your experience of studying here? Confidence? Motivation? Achievement? Continuation?
- What are your suggestions for promoting student/teacher interaction in this institution?

**Academic Advising:** How does academic advising contribute to your success and retention and how would it be improved?

*Academic advising for helping students navigate academic rules and regulations. Advisors are expected to share their knowledge of major and degree requirements, help students schedule their courses, and generally facilitate progress to the degree promptly (Baker and Griffin, 2010).*

- What is your experience of academic advising? (Frequency, nature of sessions, relationship with staff member, usefulness)
- To what extent does academic advising contribute to student success and retention?
- What are your suggestions for improving the current academic advising process in this institution?
- How does the language of communication, English or Arabic, affect your academic advising?

**Mentoring:** How does mentoring contribute to your success and retention, and how could it be improved?

*Mentorship refers to the emotional commitment that extends beyond sharing degree requirements and academic information; mentoring relationships are rooted in a mentor's long-term caring about a student's personal and professional development Baker and Griffin (2010).*

- What experiences do you have of mentoring?

- How does mentoring contribute to student success and retention?
- What are your suggestions for improving the current mentoring process in this institution?
- How does the language of communication, English or Arabic, affect your mentoring sessions?

**Formal Interaction: What is good teaching and how does it contribute to your retention and success?**

*Formal interaction refers to the daily classroom teaching and learning process. It entails aspects of teaching as teaching clarity, pedagogical practices, assessment, use of technology, active and collaborative learning.*

- In your view, what is good teaching that helps you to be successful?
- How does good teaching contribute to student retention and success?
- What advice would you give to your teacher to help you succeed?
- Does having a bilingual teacher (English/Arabic) have an impact on your learning and success?

## Appendix 6 - Focus Group Questions – Teachers

### Focus Group Questions – Teachers

**Informal Interaction:** To what extent do you have informal interaction with students, how has this contributed to their success during their first year of study? How could informal interaction with students be improved?

*Informal interaction refers to opportunities to discuss academic and non-academic matters with teachers, e.g. at the end of taught sessions, when you see them around campus, via email etc.*

- What types of informal interaction you have with students? Can you give me some examples?
- In your view, does student-teacher informal interaction have an impact on student retention and success?
- What are your suggestions for promoting student/teacher interaction in this institution?
- How does the language of communication, English or Arabic, affect your informal interaction with students?

**Academic Advising:** How does academic advising contribute to student success and retention and how would it be improved?

*Academic advising for helping students to navigate academic rules and regulations. Advisors are expected to share their knowledge of major and degree requirements, help students schedule their courses, and generally facilitate progress to the degree promptly (Baker and Griffin, 2010).*

- What is your experience of academic advising? (Frequency, nature of sessions, relationship with students, usefulness)
- To what extent does academic advising contribute to student success and retention?
- What are your suggestions for improving the current academic advising process in this institution?
- How does the language of communication, English or Arabic, affect your academic advising?

**Mentoring:** How does mentoring contribute to student success and retention, and how could it be improved?

*Mentorship refers to the emotional commitment that extends beyond sharing degree requirements and academic information; mentoring relationships are rooted in a mentor's long-term caring about a student's personal and professional development (Baker and Griffin, 2010).*

- What experiences do you have of mentoring?
- How does mentoring contribute to student success and retention?
- What are your suggestions for improving the current mentoring process in this institution?
- How does the language of communication, English or Arabic, affect your mentoring sessions?

**Formal Interaction: What is good teaching and how does it contribute to student retention and success?**

*Formal interaction refers to the daily classroom teaching and learning process. It entails aspects of teaching as teaching clarity, pedagogical practices, assessment, use of technology, active and collaborative learning.*

- In your view, what is good teacher?
- How do you engage students during your lessons?
- How does good teaching contribute to student retention and success?
- What advice would you give to your teacher to help you succeed?

## Appendix 7 - Consent Form – Students

### Human Research Ethics Committee



### Consent Form - Students

#### Informed Consent for

#### Retention of At-Risk Students: A Case Study from a Tertiary Education Institution in the Middle East.

Mokhtar Bouchak, Doctorate Research Student, Department of Education.

Please tick the appropriate boxes

Yes No

#### 1. Taking part in the study

I have read and understood the study information dated 24<sup>th</sup> February, 2019, or it has been read to me. I

have been able to ask questions about the study and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. ☐ ☐

I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study and understand that I can refuse to answer questions

and I can withdraw from the study at any time up until data have been analysed, without having to give a reason. ☐ ☐

I understand that taking part in the study involves audio recording of a focus group. ☐ ☐

The information will be captured through an audio recorded focus group.

I understand that by taking part in the study, there will be an audio recorded focus group which involves other participants listening to my input. ☐ ☐

## **2. Use of the information in the study**

I understand that information I provide will be used for a doctorate thesis.

The focus group data will only be held for the duration of the research, and it will be used only for the purpose of the study and will be deleted in accordance with local data retention rules.

I understand that personal information collected about me that can identify me, such as my name or where I live, will not be shared beyond the study team.

I understand *that my data will* be stored in a password protected area of a college server for a year after the completion of the study.

## **3. Future use and reuse of the information by others**

I give permission for the data of this focus group that I provide to be deposited in a specialist data centre after it has been anonymised, so it can be used for future research and learning.

- Specify in which form the data will be deposited, e.g. de-identified (anonymised) transcripts, audio recording, survey database, etc.; and if needed repeat the statement for each form of data you plan to deposit.

*The data will be deposited in a specialist data centre, in a secure sever. The data consists of Focus group recording, focus group recording transcript, focus group transcript translation.*

- Specify whether deposited data will be de-identified (anonymised), and how. Make sure to describe this in detail in the information sheet.

*The Deposited data will be de-identified through giving pseudonyms to all participants as highlighted in the information sheet.*

- Specify whether use or access restrictions will apply to the data in future, e.g. exclude commercial use, apply safeguarded access, etc.; and discuss these restrictions with the repository in advance.

*All data will be safe guarded and password protected.*

- Destruction of consent forms - consent forms should be kept for as long as the research data are retained (by the researcher or an archive). The original consent forms can be digitised and stored securely (encrypted), permitting the originals to then be destroyed securely by means of shredding.

*The original consent form will be digitised and saved in the college password protected server and will be destroyed after the duration of this study.*

#### 4. Signatures

---

Name of participant [IN

] Signature

Date

CAPITALS]

For participants unable to sign their name, mark the box instead of signing

☐

I have witnessed the accurate reading of the consent form with the potential participant and the individual has had the opportunity to ask questions. I confirm that the individual has given consent freely.

---

Name of participant [IN	] Signature	Date
CAPITALS]		

This research project has been reviewed by, and received a favourable opinion, from the OU Human Research Ethics Committee - HREC reference number: XXXX.

<http://www.open.ac.uk/research/ethics/>



## Appendix 8 - Consent Form – Teachers

### Human Research Ethics Committee



### Consent Form - Teachers

#### Informed Consent for

#### Retention of At-Risk Students: A Case Study from a Tertiary Education Institution in the Middle East.

Mokhtar Bouchak, Doctorate Research Student, Department of Education.

Please tick the appropriate boxes

Yes No

#### 1. Taking part in the study

I have read and understood the study information dated 24<sup>th</sup> February, 2019, or it has been read to me. I

have been able to ask questions about the study and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. ☐ ☐

I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study and understand that I can refuse to answer questions

and I can withdraw from the study at any time up until data have been analysed, without having to give a reason. ☐ ☐

I understand that taking part in the study involves audio recording of a focus group.

☐ ☐

The information will be captured through an audio recorded focus group.

I understand that by taking part in the study, there will be an audio recorded focus group which involves other participants listening to my input. ☐ ☐

## 2. Use of the information in the study

I understand that information I provide will be used for a doctorate thesis.

The focus group data will only be held for the duration of the research, and it will be used only for the purpose of the study and will be deleted in accordance with local data retention rules.

I understand that personal information collected about me that can identify me, such as my name or where I live, will not be shared beyond the study team.

I understand *that my data will* be stored in a password protected area of a college server for a year after the completion of the study.

## 3. Future use and reuse of the information by others

I give permission for the data of this focus group that I provide to be deposited in a specialist data centre after it has been anonymised, so it can be used for future research and learning.

- Specify in which form the data will be deposited, e.g. de-identified (anonymised) transcripts, audio recording, survey database, etc.; and if needed repeat the statement for each form of data you plan to deposit.

*The data will be deposited in a specialist data centre, in a secure server. The data consists of Focus group recording, focus group recording transcript, focus group transcript translation.*

- Specify whether deposited data will be de-identified (anonymised), and how. Make sure to describe this in detail in the information sheet.

*The Deposited data will be de-identified through giving pseudonyms to all participants as highlighted in the information sheet.*

- Specify whether use or access restrictions will apply to the data in future, e.g. exclude commercial use, apply safeguarded access, etc.; and discuss these restrictions with the repository in advance.

- *All data will be safe guarded and password protected.*

- Destruction of consent forms - consent forms should be kept for as long as the research data are retained (by the researcher or an archive). The original consent forms can be digitised and stored securely (encrypted), permitting the originals to then be destroyed securely by means of shredding.

- *The original consent form will be digitised and saved in the college password protected server and will be destroyed after the duration of this study.*

#### **4. Signatures**

---

Name of participant [IN ] Signature Date  
CAPITALS]

For participants unable to sign their name, mark the box instead of signing

☐

I have witnessed the accurate reading of the consent form with the potential participant and the individual has had the opportunity to ask questions. I confirm that the individual has given consent freely.

---

Name of participant [IN ] Signature Date  
CAPITALS]

This research project has been reviewed by, and received a favourable opinion, from the OU Human Research Ethics Committee - HREC reference number: XXXX.

<http://www.open.ac.uk/research/ethics/>

## Appendix 9 - Focus Group 3 Arabic Transcript

**مختار:** أوكي شباب راح نبلس انشاء الله

زي ما خبرتكم هذا الفوكس جروب هو عبارة عن بحث اقوم به فيما يخص شهادة الدكتوراة وكما خبرتكم على هذا الفورم راح اقرا لكم المحتوى بتاعها زي ما هيا

أولا مقدمة مني أنا انه هذا البحث يخص اندماج الطلاب ونجاحهم وبقائهم في الكلية يعني ما يتسربون يعني ما يتركون الكلية اوكي وراح نشوف الاشياء اللي يمكن تخلي الطالب يمكن يترك الكلية اوكي يعني حوالي ساعة زي ما خبرتكم راح اسالكم اسئلة على الاكاديميك ادفيزنج وشيء اسمه المينتورينج ودور التيتشر داخل الكلاس وخارج الكلاس

عندكم حرية في المشاركة في هذا الفوكس جروب ولازم تعرف انه اذا راح توقع على هذه الكونسينت فورم ولو عندك فيه عندك انت يمكن تقول انا ما احب معلوماتي تكون علنية ولا شيء يمكن تمسحها في اي وقت من الريسريش وهذا الداتا شباب راح انشاء الله تساعدنا على اساس راح نساهم في تحسين الوضع انشاء الله في الكلية وهذا الداتا الكلام اللي نجمعه راح يبقى مخزن بس إلى غاية الانتهاء من الدراسة هذي اوكي

وراح نحذف الاسامي ماراح نستعمل اساميكم حتى ما في حد يعرف انتا مين والصوت ما راح يستعمل بس نستعمله على أساس بعد هذا الاجتماع نكتب كتابة شو نقول اوكي فجاهزين شباب

### التواصل الرسمي

**مختار:** اوكي السؤال الاول شباب اللي هو يخص دور التيتشر داخل الكلاس اللي هو اسمها الفورمال انتراكشن انتم في رايكم شباب شو هو التيتشر الجود تيتشر ما هو التيتشر الكويس؟

(ط) اللي يهتم

**مختار:** شباب احنا هذا راح ينسجل مادام تتكلموا بصوت واضح راح التسجيل يكون احسن شو رايكم لما يقول هذا تيتشر جيد شو وصفكم للتيتشر الكويس؟

(ط) يهتم بالطالب

**مختار:** يهتم في الطالب اوكي احكوا عادي يعني شباب

(ط) يركز على كل الطلبة يشوف شو ناقصينه ما يسوي فوكس على طالب واحد فوكس على الكل يعني يشوف هذا شو محتاج وهذا وهذا وهذا مو بس واحد او اثنين مركز على عبدالله مثلا بس يركز على عبدالله وحمدان حمدان مثلا ما يعرف يقرأ عدل يركز على القراءة وعبدالله ما يعرف يكتب يركز على الكتابة يركز عليهم كلهم

**مختار:** هل انت لاحظت مرات المعلم يركز على بعض الطلاب وينسى الاخرين مثلا

(ط) هاي ينسى الشطار ترى الشطار مب شاطرين في كل شيء

مختار: اوكي

(ط) يركز على الضعاف ترى الشطار بعد يحتاجون مساعدة

**مختار:** لو كنت انت من هذي الطلاب كيف راح هيخليك تحس؟

(ط) ما بهتم في الكلاس بغييب

(ط) بتغيب الغياب يمكن يسبب انك تترك الكلية

مختار: مشاء الله عليكم افكار كويسة

(ط) الغياب بيزيد عندي عقب بنطرد واذا انطردت ما في جامعة بتقبلني عقب حكومية

مختار: فري نايس شو كمان تقوله

(ط) يراعي ظروف الطلاب مثلا اذا واحد جا متاخر وعنده ظرف يشوف ليش متاخر ياخذ الاسباب

مختار: يراعي الطالب اوكي هذا من ناحية الغياب هل في شيء ان هذا التيتشر كويس؟ كأن فيه مزايا كذا كذا

(ط) ما يفرض اسلوبه علينا يعني ما يكون متسلط علينا انا استاذ وان اذا انت غلطت ترى بعاملك بالقانون لا يكون معنا طيب يفهمنا نحترمه بطيبته ما نحترمه كيف لانه يتعامل معنا بالغياب

(ط) انه ما يشدد على الطالب انو ما يكون كل شيء معاه بالغياب وكل شيء يكتب تقرير لا نبا نحترمه لانه هو طيب وهو يتساهل معنا وبالعكس بشرحنا كل شيء او ك مب انه على اي غلطة يكتب تقرير وما يتفهم وضعنا

(ط) مب كل شيء دراسة عنده يكون انسان عقله كبير

مختار: شو برايك هذا تيتشر جود

(ط) الاستاذ مفروض ياخذ دور الاب في الدراسة يكون اب في الدراسة

مختار: يعني قدوة ... مثلا شو لازم يسوي هذا الاستاذ حتى يكون عنده هذا الدور؟

(ط) اي طالب محتاج شيء يروح للاستاذ

مختار: موجود في اي وقت يحتاجه الطالب

(ط) لو شافه متضايق في الصف بسبب شيء ثاني شيء ما يخص الكلاس يروح يكون معاه يساعد في شيء يشوفه بشيء ينصح مب بس يعني دراسة دراسة

مختار: حتى لو بيان مريض أو كذا

(ط) بيان مريض ينصح يطلع حتى يروح البيت

مختار: فري نايس مشاء الله انتم فري نايس اوكي في رايبكم انتم يعني التيتشر الكويس كيف يخلي الطالب يتم في الكلية وينجح وما ينسحب ويروح

(ط) اهم شيء ما يضغط عليه وامتحانات ورا بعض

مختار: ما ذكرتم في التيتشينج اصلا كيف؟

(ط) يركز على نقاط الضعف عندنا ويحببنا فيها يعني مب يقولنا هذا صعب ولكن يقولنا العكس هذا سهل ويفهمنا القواعد السهلة يعني نفس الرياضيات بيدأ لنا في القواعد السهلة وكل شوي بيدأ يعطينا الاصعب فالاصعب مب يعطينا الصعب ويتركنا عالصعب لا بيدأ معنا شوي شوي

مختار: اوكي وفي رايبكم هل التيتشر الكويس هذا عنده دور ان الطالب يتم او يترك الكلية ؟

(ط) نعم لانه ببسهي كل شيء يقتعني ان التقنية سهلة بقدر اكمل فيها

(ط) هذي شغلته ما المفروض يخليك تكره تتعلم

مختار: حتى لو عندك صعوبات

**مختار:** اوكي والعكس كيف يمكن التيتشر يخليك تشمئز من الكلية

(ط) يطلع قوانين على كيفه ويسجلني غياب على اتفه الاسباب ويطردك من الكلاس يخليك تكره الكلية

**مختار:** ولكن لو سجلك غياب على اساس الكلية طالبة انه لازم تتمسك بقوانين الكلية شو هو يمكن يسوي

(ط) يعني نتساهل اليوم مثلا قالي حل الهوم ورك لو ما حليته بطلعك من صفي خلي يحل وياك في الكلاس عشان انه ما يكره الحصة

**مختار:** هل عرفتموا حالات مثلا ؟

(ط) اذا مب حال الهوم ورك اطلع بره حل وتعال تتطلع بره يضيع منك عشر دقائق مب عارف تحل الهوم ورك صعب ترد الكلاس يسجلك غياب لانك كنت بره ما موجود في الكلاس ازين انت طلعتني لا والله

**مختار:** هل عرفتموا حالات مثلا طالب كان عنده اشكالية مع التيتشروترك

(ط) نعم كان عندنا واحد معانا

**مختار:** بدون ذكر اسامي

(ط) ايه طلع لانه ما كان يقدر يعني ما فهم الفونديشن

**مختار:** او علاقته مع التيتشر ما كانت كويسة

(ط) لان التيتشر كان يطرده اغلب الاوقات

(ط) وعندنا طالب بعد كان عنده عذر انه ما يقدر يجي التقية وكيف كان يتكلم مع الاستاذ يقوله عندي عذر وما دري شو على واحد بالمائة اول ما وصل خمستاشر خلاص قال بوصل خمستاشر انا كده ولا كده مطرود سحب التقية

**مختار:** وفي طريقة التدريس زي ما تقولوا انتم توصيل المعلومة شو تتوقعوا من التيتشر الكويس انه يسوي داخل الكلاس

(ط) يصير صديق الكل

**مختار:** اوكي هذه العلاقة بين انتم ماشاء الله

(ط) يوصلك المعلومة تصوير ربعه

**مختار:** فمثلا انتم في الدرس تخيل في الدرس تخرج من الدرس تقول والله زيس اذ جود شو الموصافات شو صار في الدرس هذا هل كنت جالس تستمع؟

(ط) يشرح بطريقة مبسطة ما يشرح الاشياء الجانبية يعني مثلا اذا شرحتي عن جدول الضرب يراويني كيف اطلع الناتج ما يحتاج يشرحتي قصة الضرب وكيف اخترعوا الضرب وكيف سوو الضرب هذي الشغلة ما بتقيد ابي الطريقة اللي احل فيها

**مختار:** عملي ما بس نظري

**مختار:** انت لو حبيت تعطي نصائح للتيتشر بتاعك في الدراسة في التدريس احنا نتكلم على الكلاس شو تنصح التيتشر بتاعك حتى تخليك انت .. يكون هو ناجح في تدريسه وانت طالب تكون ناجح شو النصائح اللي تعطيتها؟

(ط) نفس اللي قاله صاحبنا انو يبسط ويوصل المعلومات ولا يكترون

**مختار:** يبسط وما يكثر التفاصيل نصائح أخرى؟

(ط) وقت الكلاس مثلا اربعين دقيقة اذا نحن خلصنا قبل الاربعين دقيقة يعني ما يعطينا الاربعين دقيقة كاملة 35 دقيقة خمس دقائق بطلعنا قبل الوقت ناخذ عشر دقائق ربع ساعة

(ط) اهم شيء نكون فاهمين بس اول ما نخلص الله حبيب يطلع و اللي حبيب يجلس يجلس

مختار: تحسوا ان الاساتذة عم بيجهزوكم للامتحان

(ط) الحلو انه ما يكون كل يوم يعنى اللي نمشي عليه كل يوم نفس الموضوع لا يتغير الموضوع أو ان التيتشر يجيب سؤال بره عن الدرس قصة ؟

مختار: هذيك جاية هذا السؤال اللي بعد هذا الامور هذي اللي نحكي عليها اسمها الفورمال الرسمية الان نحكي على علاقتك مع التيتشر غير الرسمية نفس سؤالك

مختار: هل انتم في علاقة عندك ان التيتشر يدرس يكون المدرس بتاعك يرمس عربي ولا ما يرمس عربي عندها فرق

(ط) في فرق ايه لان فيه كلمات ما بتفهما بيقولك اياها بالعربي

(ط) بس الاحسن لو يتكلم انجليزي يعني عندنا في الفونديشن المس مالتنا ما بتتكم عربي بس كنا نحب نحضر كلاسها لان اول ما نسمع ان عندنا الكلاس هذا بسرعه نجيه لاننا نحب المس هاي تسولف وانا وكل شيء وبالعكس انها تصحح لنا الكلام اللي بنقوله غلط وتوضحلنا الغلط من الصح

مختار: بتكلمكم بتقولكم كلمات عربي مثلا؟

(ط) بتعلمنا كلمات لغتها

مختار: اوكي فانت يعني هل التيتشر انه يكون يعرف عربي ولا ما يعرف عربي ما عندها علاقة لانك انت تدرس انجليزي صح اوكي جود بوينت

مختار: فيما يخص الآن شباب الفورمال انتراكشن هذه معناها جود تيتشينج

مختار: هل عندكم اي شيء تضيفوه فيما يخص كيف الجود تيتشر؟ شو هي خصائص الجود تيتشر اللي يخلي الطالب يتم في الكلية هذا بس في الكلاس راح نيحي للامور الجانبية هاي

(ط) يستخدم عدة وسائل للتعليم مثلا يستخدم الانترنت

مختار: التكنولوجيا اوكي احكولي عن التكنولوجيا كيف هذه تخليكم تكونوا مندمجين؟

(ط) عندنا برامج مثل كاهوت

(ط) يعني يوم كنا في الفونديشن كان يعطونا مثلا اخر ربع ساعة كاهوت وقبل مرات كانوا يفتحون البويتوب قصة او اي شيء ناخذ وعقب نبدا نحل بروحنا يكونوا مجهز لنا اوراق وكل شيء لسنتج كنا ناخذ يعطينا كل شيء ونحل وايد اشياء بعد

مختار: هذا دور التكنولوجيا انتوا تقارنو بين ايام الكتاب والان كل شيء على الكمبيوتر هذي في رايبكم تخلي الطالب يكون مندمج اكثر على اساس استعمال التكنولوجيا الفيديو والامور هذي؟

(ط) كل شيء اسهل في اللابتوب بدال ما نكتب بايدنا خمسانة كلمة نكتب باللابتوب اسرع واريح لنا

مختار: كان عندكم الايباد ما تفرق الاي باد واللابتوب؟

(ط) يفرق الايباد تتش اللابتوب اريح

مختار: اللابتوب اريح يمكن تخزين الملفات وكذا

مختار: اوكي خيلنا الان نروح للشيء الانفورمال اللي هو الغير رسمي اللي هو انت لما تكون راح افسرلكم شو معنى انفورمال انتراكشنز



## التواصل الغير الرسمي

**مختار:** انفورمال انتراكشن هو تكون عندك فرصة انك تحكي مع التيتشر على امور اكايدمية وغير اكايدمية اوكي مثلا في نهاية الكلاس لما تشوفهم بره تشوفهم في الكار بارك في الكافيتريا تطرش ايميل

**مختار:** السؤال الاول شو نوع هذا انفورمال انتراكشن يعني الاتصال غير الرسمي الي بيصير بينك وبين التيتشر

اولا اعطوني امثلة

(ط) اول شيء على حسب عمره اذا ربال كبير معاملته كاب بس اذا واحد شباب معاملته كصديق عادي تراه واحد من الشباب بس الاحترام اللي بينا يتم موجود

**مختار:** بغض النظر انه كبير ولا صغير يبقى الاحترام

**مختار:** اعطوني امثلة انه كيف انت تندمج مع التيتشر في الامور هاي الغير رسمية مثلا

(ط) قبل فترة كان في استاذ يعني بدون ذكر اسامي كات يطنز يعني كيف انتو ثلاثة طالعين مع بعض ورايحين مكان مدري كيف هذا شيء كيف يخليك مادري كيف ان انت تحترم هذا الشخص كيف تنظرله كيف يكون مسؤول عني بعد كيف نظرتي لهذا الاستاذ ليش يرمس عنك ايش شي قال مب معاناتها اننا انتقلنا من هالمرحلة ان انت اسلوبك يتغير معانا لا تم مع نفس الطالب خليك اوكي بعد يدخل نفس تخصصك انت تتطور تدرس شيء ثاني يكون وياك

**مختار:** اوكي قولت انت كلام انه ينكت وكذا اذكروا حتى في الكلاس او وقت البريك كيف اعطوني امثلة كيف انه صار بينكم كلام مع التيتشر ما عنده علاقة بالدراسة مثلا؟

(ط) لما نسأل الأسئلة لما يسأل يقول انا برمس ويا واحدة بالانجليزي كيف؟ المس تشرله او تقوله كيف

**مختار:** او تحكي على رياضة أو شيء

(ط) يعني النكت

**مختار:** الجوكس النكت فيكم يعني تحكو مع التيتشر مثلا بره في الكافيتريا تجلسوا مع بعض تشربوا قهوة او شيء

(ط) ما نشفهم يشردون بعد يخلصوا الكلاس يشردون

**مختار:** يخفقون في السي بلوك اوكي انتم في رايمك يعني هذا الاندماج غير الرسمي مع التيتشر في رأيكم تحتاجوا اكثر منه يعني تفصل لو تجلسوا مع التيتشر وهكذا تشربوا قهوة مع بعض

(ط) تترتاح اكثر

**مختار:** كيف تخليك انت زي ما قلت هكذا تنكت كيف تخليك تحب الكلية وتحب التيتشر وتحب تكون في هذا المكان مثلا

(ط) تحترمه في نفسك وتحترمون بعض

(ط) هذا هو مثلا ما يحب تقوله هالكلام هو نفس الشيء المفروض ما يقولك ما يطنز عليك او شيء

**مختار:** اوكي امثلة اخرى على يعني التيتشر يكون زي الفريند زي ما قولت كيف هذا التيتشر يخليك تحب تكون في الكلية لانه زي اخوك الكبير

(ط) المفروض يكون اكثر شباب يعني انه سالف شباب لان كل اللي يدرسهم صغار توهم 18 او 19

(ط) ما يسولف سالف كبار على قد عمره مثلا

**مختار:** هل هم يسولف معاكم سالف الشباب ولا نادرا

(ط) نادرا

مختار: لو كان فيه هذا لاتصال اكثر يكون احسن ؟

(ط) احسن وبعدين الطالب ما بيستحي يكلم الاستاذ بيقوله مثلا أو يطلب منه بيكون او كي وياه لانه نفس ربيعه يعتبره

مختار: اعطني امثلة على الاشياء اللي تتمنى لو كانت تكون بينك وبين التيتشر هل مثلا واتساب او الايميلات

(ط) واتساب جروب

مختار: للكلاس مثلا

(ط) يعني احنا قبل امتحان الامسات كلنا في الجروب متبهدين ما عرفنا شو ندرس بالضبط حنا ما عندنا رقم الاستاذ ولا رقم المس احنا ما نعرف شو ندرس المهم دخلنا على الله على الامتحان واللي نجحو من صوبنا بس ثلاثة انا وهو وواحد ثاني بس احنا والباقيين كلهم رسبو لانهم ما عرفوا شو يذاكرون فاتحين مليون الف صفحة ما يعرفون من وين يدون ومن وين يخلصون ما عندهم شيء

مختار: انتم اي لفل بلشتوا

(ط) انا لفل 4

(ط) انا 2

(ط) لفل 3

مختار: هتبلش في جانيواري

الحين شهر واحد او كي

مختار: لفل 2

شهر واحد

لفل 3

لفل 4 عقب امسات

مختار: هو الموضوع البحث بتاعي يخص طلاب السنة الأولى يعني ديمنا اذكرولي اي شيء عنده علاقة بيك انت كطالب في السنة الاولى اشياء المهمة هذي مثلا اشياء في علاقتك مع التيتشر شو الاشياء اللي نقدر نراعيها على اساس انت طالب جديد يمكن ما صارت

(ط) انت جاي جديد ما تعرف شيء يفهمونك كل شيء بالكلية

(ط) يفهمونك بس مب يعني اول ما دخلنا عندنا استاذ ترى انا اسوي كذا وانا اسوي كذا وانا اسوي كذا يعني كلا يهدد

من أول ما يشوفك هذا خلي ينفجر لين باكر انا هذا بطلع عينه في الصف ويوم دشينا المس الثانية كان وايد تسولف تضحك بالعكس هي اللي حبيتنا بالكلاس

(ط) حتى ما كان يعطينا بريك اذكر

(ط) كان يجمع حصتين وانت تمل تزهج من الدراسة ما تبي تدرس خلاص مخك يروح مكان اخر

(ط) مدرس يانا اسبوع اول كلاس كله يسحب كلاسه كله صاحب صاحب

(ط) هو نفسه يضغط على الطالب اكثر من وقته عشان يعطي عقبه بريك لا خلنا نفس الباقيين يعني احنا اربعين دقيقة انت اربعين دقيقة

(ط) يعني عشر دقائق انت تبا تشوف ربعك ربعك صوب الجامع تشوفهم بره تكره الاستاذ زيادة

**مختار:** هذي تثير الطلاب موضوع علاقته مع الاستاذ وكيف الاستاذ يلعوزك ويخليك تشمئز من الكلية وكذا وكذا شو نصيحتكم شو الحل للتيتشر على أساس يكون

(ط) ان الكلية تكلم الاستاذ مثلا او اسير عند حد انه يكلم الاستاذ بس ما يقول حق الاستاذ ان انا اللي قال

(ط) الاستاذ يحاول يتقرب من الطالب بفهمه هو بطريقته هو ويمكن هالطريقة تزعج الطالب المفروض الاستاذ انه يتقرب معاه بطريقة انه شافه بدا ينزعج شوية بيتعد ولا يغير من الطريقة مب انه يصر على نفس الطريقة لان عندنا في الكلاس مستانسين والله يقولون لا والله اوكي بيجمع ما بعطينا بريك عشر دقائق بس بيطلعنا قبل الطلاب بعشر دقائق شي كام واحد بس الباقيين منز عجين المفروض يشوف راي الاغلبية ويسويه مب على مزاجه ومزاج كام طالب يقول خلاص هذا شيء صح

**مختار:** اوكي ذكرت انت يعطوك معلومات في الايام الاولى شو كان حسيتو مثلا التيتشر كانوا بعض منهم مقصرين كانوا يعطوك معلومات اكثر شو نوع المعلومات هذي اللي انتوا تحتاجوها في البداية

(ط) طريقة استعمال البلاورد كيف الدخول طريقة كيف نتواصل مع الاستاذ بالايمل وكيف اذا محتاجين شيء أي شيء يعلمونا على البلاورد كيف نشيك على الدرجات والجدول وكيف نشيك على الدرجات بعد الامتحان

**مختار:** وهذي الاشياء حسيتوا ما عرفتها من البداية

(ط) اتاخرنا لين ما عرفناها شو بلاورد شو ب اس اس ما عرف ولا شيء هم بعدين يشرحولي شو بي اس اس وكيف افتح الايمل

**مختار:** مين شرحهولك

(ط) الميسر والمستر شرحلنا بعد

**مختار:** لو عرفنا قبل من البداية ليش حتى تقعدوا اسبوعين

(ط) انا من اول يوم شرحولي

**مختار:** حضرتم في الاوريناشن ولا لأ اللي هو يوم التوجيه

(ط) لا ما حضرت

(ط) اول يوم حضرت

**مختار:** هي الاشكالية معظم الطلاب ما يحضرون يعني يحضر مثلا 30 بالمائة و 70 يجوا ما عارفين شو السالفة داخل الكلاس ما يعرف كيف احنا نراوهم كيف الجداول وغيرها

(ط) اول ما دخلت الكلاس كان بس شرح كيف وين تدخل شو تسوي

**مختار:** اوكي ناو حكينا على الموضوع اللي كيف التيتشر يخليك تكون عندك مثلا ثقة في نفسك كيف التيتشر يخليك تكون متحفز كيف التيتشر يخليك تتجج وكيف التيتشر يخليك تتم في الكلية اعطوني كل واحد يعطيني هاك ذا

(ط) عشان الثقة بالنفس احس لو يسون جروب جروب شارينج تشارك مع الجروب تحس انك متجاوب مع ربيك ترا عادي

**مختار:** جروب في داخل الكلاس أو مع كلاس ثاني

(ط) لا تكون في نفس الكلاس

**مختار:** يعني تشتغلوا كمجموعات حلو او كي

(ط) اشوف انا ان التواصل لازم يكون دائم

**مختار:** كيف تقترح هذا التواصل يكون

(ط) بالايمل او واتساب او يسون شيء اقرب من الايميل مثلا يعطينا رقمه

**مختار:** موبايله يعني ولكن انا سمعت مع التيتشر يقولك زين ولكن لازم تكون في حدود

(ط) يمكن اتصل اربعة الفجر

**مختار:** او تبقى تبعث صور وتصير اشياء العلاقة تتطور اكثر من اللازم فشو ردك على الموضوع هذا او تحطوه مثلا واتساب جروب وقال هذه الاشياء اللي تحط فيه وبس لا تحط انت شو سويت والامور هذي

(ط) صح جروب خاص بالكلاس بس

**مختار:** نعم معايير مثلا غيرنا كلاس احنا رحنا هناك وكذا

**مختار:** هذا من ناحية الموتي فاشن ... الموتي فاشن هي ان الطالب يكون موتيفاتد يكون متحمس كيف شو الجود التيتشر يسوي حتى يخليك في العلاقة غير الرسمية يخليك تكون موتيفاتد

(ط) يرمسلك عن اشياء هو سواها مثلا يقول انا رحت سكي دبي واستانست ومدري شو الشباب يتحمسون خلينا نسير ولا نفس دبي فاتحة شقة عبارة عن شقة كاملة عن نفس بيت الرعب تدخل الغاز ما الغاز شي يعني اذا فتحوا هالمواضيع الشباب بيتحمسون قوموا بلا بنسير بنجرب كلنا ويا بعض

**مختار:** المواضيع اللي يهتم فيها الطالب يرمسوا عليها في الكلاس مثلا ماعدا هذا غرفة الرعب مثلا شو المواضيع

(ط) يعطينا رايه مثلا عن هالاماكن مثلا اذا راح البر يقول اذا راح مول مثلا

(ط) اذا راح فلم يعطينا رايه في الفلم

**مختار:** او انت يسألك عن الفلم

(ط) يسال الشباب مثلا منو راح الفلم كيف الفلم والله وايد حلو ولا بايخ يعني يعطينا رايه

**مختار:** مش بيلش كلاس على بلاورد

(ط) اول ما يدخل يسلم ويسولف شوي يشوف نفسه وين عقب بيذا شي او ك

(ط) اول ما يدخل على طول افتحوا بلاورد بلاورد

(ط) اول عشر دقائق يسولف يعطي فرصة للمتأخر يدخل

**مختار:** سوالف على كيف الويك اند كيف الجو هذي تخليكم

(ط) خصوصا يوم الاحد بيكون اكثر يوم.

### التوجيه الأكاديمي

**مختار:** خلاص انتم جاوبتم على هذا السؤال ننتقل للسؤال الثالث اللي هو الأكاديمك أدفيزنج اللي هو التوجيه الأكاديمي انتم شوفتوا اول حصة توجيه اكايمي تكون معايا في المسرح اعطيكم معلومات على السيكل على الاسمنتت على كيف شو هو الأكاديمك أدفيزنج وبعدين تكون عند حصة بينك وبين التيتشر هو يجلس معاك

يعني الأكاديمك أدفيزنج شباب لمعلوماتكم لما تروحوما التخصص غير الأكاديمك أدفيزنج راح بس يجلس معاك الادفيزر ويقولك انت تختار المواد هذي هذي حسب الكتالوج حتى يراويك كيف المواد اللي تنزلها حتى تروح للتخصص إلى التحريج هذا هو الأكاديمك أدفيزنج في التخصص من الصيف راح يكون عندكم أكاديمك أدفيزر

ولكن في الفونديشن أكاديمك أدفيزنج احنا غير اللي هيا المعلومات اللي اعطيك اياها في المسرح كهذي السيكل كذا وهالسنة الدراسية كذا تعيد وكيف تنجح وكذا كذا وبعدين في أكاديمك أدفيزنج بينك وبين التيتشر تجلسوا وان تو وان

تتذكروا السؤال الآن شو هي تجربتك في الأكاديمك أدفيزنج في الكلية يعني كم مرة كان عندك أكاديمك أدفيزنج كيف كانت علاقتك مع التيتشر في الأكاديمك أدفيزنج هل كان فيها فائدة اعطوني معلومات عن هذا؟

(ط) لازم الطالب اذا بيى نصايح او شيء من الاكاديمك ادفيزنج لازم يعرف شو التخصص اللي هو بياه

**مختار:** اوكي يعني في الأكاديمك أدفيزنج نعطيكم معلومات على التخصص اللي تبغاه اوكي

(ط) والسؤال لازم يكون يعنى يتعلق بالتخصص وان ما يسأل سؤال غير عنه بعيد عن هذا والوقت ما يكون وقت وايد عشان الطالب ما يمل يعني يقسمونه مثلا هذا اليوم واليوم اللي بعده او الاسبوع اللي بعده يعطونك عن التخصصات الثانية عشان ما تمل

**مختار:** اهم شيء يعطيك ساعتين على اليزنيس

(ط) او نص ساعة عن هالتخصص

(ط) يدخل على الاشياء الاساسية اللي نفهما وايد

**مختار:** طب شو تقترحون انتم مثلا

(ط) اهم شيء الوقت وما يكون كلاس اللي هو العصر من كلاس العصر انت تكون طهجان وملان خلاص

يخلونه مثلا اول كلاس او يكتسلون كلاس ويخلون هالكلاس

**مختار:** اوكي ماعدا هذا في موضوع التخصص حسيتو اعطيناكم المعلومات الكافية او حسيتو كيف

لان احنا اول مرة احنا الوحيديين اللي نسوي ورش زي ما تتذكرو السيكل اللي طاف جيتوا كلكم المسرح واعطاكم المعلومات اوكي ما عدا الاكاديمك ادفيزنج هل فهمتوا لما السيكل شو هي السيكل وكم باقيلكم ايام في الدراسة والعطلة وكيف تنجح في الفونديشن

(ط) هي عندنا في الكلاس كان في الجدول ورا بس الجدول ما كان موضح عدل عدل

**مختار:** وبعدين وضحناه وموجود كمان في البلابورد

(ط) واصلا المس والمستر كان بروهم يقولون مثلا باقيلكم ويك فايف ويك تو كان شي بداية كل كلاس

**مختار:** اوكي احكولي شباب الان على الاكاديمك ادفيزنج اللي صار بينكم وبين التيتشر الحصص اللي تجلس مع التيتشر ويحكوكم على درجاتكم والكويزات شو كان انطباعكم في الحصص هذي

(ط) كان مثلا اذا جلسنا صوبه يقولي مثلا في الريدينج جبت شي الريدينج اللي عند تعبان شد حيلك ويعطينا مثلا عن الريدينج وشي وكيف اقرا

(ط) تدخل البلابورد وتدرس هذا واللك اللي يخص فيه عشان تقوي عمرك

**مختار:** استفدتو من هذا ؟

(ط) وايد ولا كيف احنا نجحنا في الفونديشن كانت عندي مشكلة في الرايتنج والمس اعطتني ورقة وكتبت لي براجراف كامل تقريباً هي كتبت تعلمت منها وفي الامسات كتبنا نفس ما هي علمتنا

مختار:كم كان عندكم حصة اكاديمك ادفيزنج في السيكل

(ط) بس هيا كانت بتكون حصص الافترونون

مختار:هي اداريا اللي احنا طالبينها من التيتشر حصتين واحدة معايا في المسرح وواحدة مع التيتشر وان تو وان

انتم شباب كيف استفدت من الجلسة مع التيتشر

(ط) وان تو وان استفدت وايد لان اول شيء ما كنت اركز على النقاط وما النقاط في الرايتنج ما كنت اركز تمت تنصحي تقولي هني تحط نقطة يوم بتخلص هالموضوع بتحطلي نقطة وعقب تبدأ في موضوع ثاني بتحط مثلاً ال أي لازم تكون كابيتال فادنتي بوايد أشياء وعقب ما علمتني على الرايتنج وشي جبت اكثر من 150

(ط) والحلو انها تعرفك اكثر من نفسك

مختار:استفدت من ال وان تو وان لانه تشوفو نقاط تخص بيك انت بدل ما تدرس للجميع

او كي الان في رايمك الأكاديميك ادفيزنج هذي اللي نسووها كيف عندها دور انه تخلي الطالب يتم في الكلية لو انت ما عندك أكاديميك ادفيزنج هذي هل تحس انه يعني انت يمكن تتجج بدون هذا الأكاديميك ادفيزنج هل عندها دور

(ط) هذا بحظك لان انت ما بتعرف شو نقاط ضعفك هم بيقولوك

(ط) اول مرة امتحنت ما نجحت لان ما اعرف شنو الغلط اللي انا مسوينه ما حد يقولي شنو الغلط

(ط) ببيكون اصعب يعني بتركز على كل شيء بدل ما تركز بس على انا كان عندي ضعف في الرايتنج يعني بدون المس كنت ركزت على الريدينج وعلى الفوكاب وعلى الجرامر وعلى الرايتنج كنت ركزت عليهم كلهم واحتمال ما انجح لان اولرادي الريدينج عندي او كي والفوكاب او كي بس اللي ناقصيني الرايتنج والجرامر هما الاثنين اللي ناقصيني بس ما كنت بسوي فوكس عليهم وايد سويت فوكس عليهم والحمد لله اتطورت مختار:خليني اسالك سؤال ثاني انتم يعني لما جيتم في الفونديشن يو ار ات ريسك لانه جايين مش ناجحين في الانجليزي حلوشو كان سبب هذا الموضوع؟

(ط) مدارس يعني يجوبوك استاذ ما يعرف الانجليزي عدل

لانها مدارس نصهم يهال نصهم اطفال يلعبون في الصف عشرة يضاربون ما بتنتبه

(ط) هو يدخل بروحه الاستاذ ما مفكر درستك ما درستك اخر الشهر ينزلي راتب ما مسوي فوكس هو

(ط) الاستاذ ايام المدرسة كان يعطي اللي عنده ما يهتم في الطلاب على مستوى الطلاب

(ط) يعني يكتب خلص مسح كتب خلص مسح ما مفكر في الطلاب فهموا ما فهموا ما مهتم

(ط) حتى التجنيد وايد اثر السنة كاملة انا رديت مع خط متغير كل شيء يعني

مختار:طب سلبيا

(ط) وايد لان انت بتدرس عقب سنة كاملة انت بعيد عن الدراسة ما تعرف شيء اسمها انجليزي الا عربي او حتى عربي ما

(ط) انت بعيد عن تليفونك ما تكتب في تليفونك ما تكتب بايدك تنزل ويك اند يوم واحد حتى لو عندك وقت انك تكتب او تقرا ما

تبغي

(ط) يعن نحنا نسينا اهلنا في الحجز ما بننسى انجليزي

مختار:لو كانوا عاطينكم مثلاً حصص وانتم في الخدمة

(ط) ببيكون احسن

(ط) ما ببيكون احسن يدخلونا القاعة الكل يرقد من التعب انت تقوم الساعة ثلاثة صباحاً وتنام الساعة تسعة يعني تنام خمس

ساعات تقريباً

مختار:لكن شنو الحل مثلاً الموضوع الطالب بينسى كتير وهو في فترة الخدمة شو رايمك الحل؟

(ط) صح بنسى كتير بس بيفضل الدراسة على الحياة العسكرية بيقول خلاص انا من بطلع بتدخل التقنية بشد حيلي وبسوي

وبيبدا من الصفر صح انه نسي بس بتكون عنده عزيمة

**مختار:** في بعض البلدان على فكرة انت لما تنجح في الثانوية العامة يخلوك تخلص الجامعة وبعدين تروح الخدمة وللي ما ينجح هو اللي يوده الخدمة ولكن في بعض الدول نسبة اللي ينجحو واللي ما ينجحو تقريبا 50 %

(ط) مثل اليابان اظنهم او كوريا

**مختار:** مش عارف اليابان اذا كان

(ط) حتى عندنا انزين ان رسبت مرة يطوفونك ان رسبت مرة ثانية تدخل الخدمة

**مختار:** ولكن على ذكر الخدمة هذي خلتكم منضبطين اكثر في الكلية صح

(ط) هي احسن

**مختار:** بيني وبينك التيتشر حاسين بفرق الي كانو يجون مباشرة من المدرسة

(ط) كل واحد يشوف فيه احترام اسلوب اتغير طريقة

(ط) تبني شخصيتك يعني

**مختار:** اوكي هذا موضوع اللي خلى موضوع الانجليزي في المدارس وكذا اللي خلاكم من البداية جابين على اساس ان انتم ات ريسك لانك مش ناجح فيما يخص مثلا هل نفس الشيء بالنسبة للرياضيات فيه حد فيكم اختار انجنييرنج

(ط) في الكلاس عندنا انا بنحتاج الرياضيات في البرنيس

(ط) اكونتينج او

**مختار:** في موضوع الرياضيات شو صعب ليش مثلا

(ط) الحين استقدت انا في اشياء ما كنت اعرفها كنت الرادي ادخا نفسها بس شي اتطالع ما كنت مركز بس الحين شو الاستاذ يسوي الاستاذ يخلينا احنا نبطل الكمبيوتر اللابتوب ونشوف الحل عرفنا نحله حلناه ما عرفنا نحل نزقره بشرحنا اياه والحلو في البرنامج انه مو مرة واحدة تحل تروح السالفة لا عندك خمس مرات تحل غلطت في المرة الرابعة يعيدك ينقصلك نقطة لازم ترد تحل مرتين لين كيف لما السؤال يثبت في مخك عقب تحول على السؤال اللي بعده

(ط) ويعطيك اكسامبل

**مختار:** في السؤال موضوع الرياضيات هل كان الاشكالية في المدرسة نفس المشاكل اللي ذكرتها على الانجليزي اللي هي التيتشر وكذا او درستوا بلغة ثانية الرياضيات مثلا

(ط) احنا في الدرسه اغلبينا كانوا مدراس حكومية يعني الرياضيات بالعربي لما جينا هنا بالانجليزي شوي

**مختار:** كلكم كنتو تدرسو بالعربي

(ط) معانا كانو يدرسو انجليزي

(ط) بس ما كنا مركزين على الكلاس لان المدرسة العكس الاستاذ ما يركز على الفاشل يركز على الشاطر همه الشاطر يستوي احسن والفاشل خله فاشل يقول الفاشل يتم طول عمره فاشل

**مختار:** انتم كنتم علمي ولا ادبي

(ط) علمي

**مختار:** كلكم؟

(ط) لا انا ادبي

**مختار:** المهم اتفقنا انو هذي الأكاديميك أدفيزنج حصص استقدتم منها كثير ولكن شو اقتراحاتكم لنحسن من هذا الأكاديميك أدفيزنج اللي نسويها هذي الحصص بينك وبين التيتشر هل في نصائح هل كان مفروض ؟

(ط) بالصراحة الوقت يعني ان ما تكون الحصة طويلة وما تكون العصر احنا العصر يعني اغلب الطلاب ما يجون

**مختار:** التوقيت

(ط) يعني مثلا اذا الثلاثاء عندنا ثلاث حصص مثلا من الساعة تسعة لين الساعة واحدة يكتسلون الحصة الاخيرة ويخلونها حق التنتشير مع الطالب احسن ما يزيدونها يعوطونا مثلا بريك ساعة وعقب يرد عشان هالشئ يروح ما بيرد

**مختار:** اوكي توقيتها لو حطبتها لكم مثلا انتم كانت عندكم يمكن خمس دقائق صح كان عندكم وقت اكثر مثلا

(ط) بصراحة الوقت كان يكفي يعني

**مختار:** كان يكفي بس توجيه و خلاص

(ط) مب خمس دقائق خلاص خمس دقائق حسب عادي تعطيك زيادة اذا انت مثلا مشكلتك اكبر من مشكلة اللي قبلك ما بتخليك تروح تقعد وانت مب فاهم شئ

**مختار:** اوكي ما عدا التوقيت بدل المساء تكون مثلا الصباح في اي اقتراحات انه احنا كل مرة نضيف

هذا الكارد اللي كان يعطوكم نسخات هذي هذا شيء جديد سويناه نهاية السنة اللي طافت قبل كان بس التيتشر يرسم معاك ويشوف سبريد شيت فيها الجراذر استفدتكم من الكارد هذي؟ كيف مثلاً على أساس تشوف اللي قدامك يعني تشوف درجاتك مش بس تيجي مستمع تجي مشارك صح وفي اي اقتراح كيف نحسن الأكاديمك أدفيزنج؟

(ط) لا الأكاديمك صراحة انتوا ما مقصرين في هالشئ

مختار: لو انت الأكاديمك أدفيزر كان حد اداري مش يور تيتشر

(ط) بس بقلوك شيء استاذ م عندي شباب الرادي داشين التخصص وكل شيء يرمسون عن كيف يمدحولي مثلاً الأكاديمك أدفيزر اللي ينصحهم أكثر من يقولون هذا خايس ولا هذا ما ما ينعطى واي ولا هذا وايد يتسولف لا هذا يحب يتكلم وايد عن اشياء ما تخصه غير عن واحد يعطيك المعلومة وخلص الشباب بيون واحد يعطيهم المعلومة وخلص انه انت شو مسوي كذا كذا لا شد حيلك في هالمادة هالمادة انت ناقصة درجاتك انت محتاج تشد حيلك في هالمادة خلاص او كي تمام يعطيك العافية توكل بس ما يحتاج انه يسولف وعقب يرد يطلعلي على مواضيع ثانية يشوفلي اشياء ما تخصه خلاص الموضوع الاساسي يمكن الطالب عنده اشياء مستعجلة اذا شاف الطالب قاعد او كي تبي تسوالف سوالف خذ راحتك

مختار: ادخل في لب الموضوع وانتهى الامر اعطيني مثال هل حسيت انه الاكاديمك أدفيزر دخل في امور

(ط) يعني انا لا بس؟؟ يدخلهم في اشياء ثانية مثلاً يسالهم وين رايحين الويك اند والولد مستعجل ما يقدر يقوله انا مستعجل يعني يحس انها قلة ادب

مختار: ولكن في وقت الكلاس هذي؟

(ط) في قت الكلاس لكن

مختار: اللي يخلص يروح او كي لو الأكاديمك أدفيزنج هذي سواها حد مش التيتشر بتاعك مثلاً تيتشر ما يدرسك هل هذي في رايكم احسن؟

(ط) لا لان التيتشر انت تعرفه هذا اول مرة تشوفه ما تاخذ راحتك معاه

(ط) استاذك يعرفك عدل اما اذا جاني واحد ثاني انت مسوي كذا لا ما مسوي انت ناقص لا انا او كي في هذا اما غير ان مدرسك يقولك انت مسوي صح توافق ان انت مسوي كذا يعرفك لو جاني استاذ ثاني ما كنت عارفه بقولي الرايتنج مالك مب او كي بقوله انا او كي الرايتنج مالي بيقولي انا شوفته مبا انا واثق من الرايتنج مالي بس المس مالتى اللي كانت تشوفني تقولي صححت الرايتنج مالي هي انا بتأكد انا هيا صح ما بجلس اناقشها واجادلها شي وبتعطيني نصايح بتقبلها من مدرسي وما بتقبلها من مدرس ثاني

مختار: او كي الان لو حد في الاكاديمك أدفيزنج يرسم معاك بالعربي ولا بالانجليزي ما تفرق صح

(ط) بقول يكون بالعربي احسن عشان تفهم كل شيء لان صح انت الحين فونديشن ما تعرف كل الكلمات بالانجليزي يدخلك كلمة صعبة في اثناء الحوار انت ما بتفهمها فبتسحب عالكلمة

### التوجيه الشخصي

مختار: او كي الان الموضوع الاخير اللي هنتطرق اليه اسمها المينتورينج خليني اشرحلكم شباب شو معنى المينتورينج

المنتورينج هذي ما بعد الأكاديمك أدفيزنج التوجيه الأكاديمي يجي المينتورينج المينتورينج هي انه الاستاذ يهتم بالطالب مش بس الجانب الأكاديمي ما بعد الجانب الأكاديمي يعني يصير فيه علاقة بينه وبين الطالب مثلاً الامور اللي تخص الشخصية يعني يحكي زي ما قولت يسألك انت كيف كان الويك اند وكذا هذي هي المينتورينج (ط) بس ان كيف ما بتقبلها من كل الاساتذة يعني في اساتذة ما تبليها

مختار: فهذي تخليك انت تحس ان التيتشر كيرز يعني يهتم فيك كطالب هذا مو الموضوع الاخير اعطينا شو نوع من

المنتورينج اللي صارت بينك وبين التيتشر في هذا السياق اعطوني امثلة مثلاً

(ط) امثلة عن كيف الاستاذ كير يعني مهتم؟

مختار: بس مش بس في الدراسة يعني كير ابوت يو كشخص مثلاً

(ط) مثلاً كنت مرة قاعد في الكلاس متضايق جاتني المس قالتلي انت مب طبيعي اليوم قتلها لا ما في شيء كانت مصرة لا انت مب طبيعي ها نفس الأمثلة

مختار: هذا هو مثال على

(ط) والتاخير بعد نفس الشيء شو صار فيك ليش اتاخرت

(ط) يعني هي متعودة انك انت ما تتاخر جيت هاليوم متاخر ليش متاخر

(ط) صار ليك ظرف اي شيء

(ط) تسامحك يعني فانت بتحبها زيادة

مختار: يعني انتو تقولو الشخص هذا مهتم فيا مش بس انت جايب صفر وجايب غياب كذا تشوفك كشخص



(ط) لو جيت متاخر تقوله مثلا زحمة بقولك ليش ما تتطلع قبل انت شوي تنترفز  
(ط) والحلو المس او المستر يهتم في الطالب  
مختار: هل عندك امثلة مثلا التيتشر اهتم فيك  
(ط) هي استوى معي في التأخير مهتم ليش انت غايب ليش متاخر وشي وتقول السبب فيهم  
مختار: اعطينا امثلة حسيت انو التيتشر مهتم فيك كشخص اكثر منه كطالب  
(ط) موقف استوالك يعني؟  
مختار: نعم نفس الموقف اللي كان متضايق و جا قاله التيتشر  
(ط) في مرة انا ما حليت ما عرفت احل وكنت جالس في الصف وسرحان فمن نخلص الدوام يعني خلصت الحصة الكل طلع  
والاستاذ جا عندي قالي انت ليش ما حليت هالاسئلة وشي قالي ادخل على هاللك وادخل بي اس اس وقالي حل الفوكاب وشي  
عشان تنجح لو ما نصحنى هالنصيحة يمكن ما كنت انجح لاني ما كنت ادرس عقب ما هو اعطاني الادفيز وطلعت انا معاه  
وتمينا ندرس ويا بعض الحمد لله نجحنا من بعد البراكتس بعد ما هو اهتم يعني لو كان مو مهتم لان انا عادي ما كنت بركز  
اشوف الانجليزي عادي سهل وانا اغلط في الكلاس عادي مب لازم براكتس لكن بعد ما هو اهتم وقالي ادخل وراجع وهذا  
طلعت معاه واتعلمنا ويا بعض الحمد لله نجحت  
(ط) ما صار لي هالموقف  
مختار: ما صار لك موقف؟  
(ط) لا لاني من اخلص الكلاس اطلع  
مختار: لا هذي يمكن تصوير وانت داخل الكلاس  
(ط) لا وقت الكلاس كنت احل واشارك  
مختار: يعني ما عندك تجربة كويسة عن الموضوع على اساس ان تحس انه التيتشر ما عنده اهتمام فيك  
(ط) لا احس ان عنده اهتمام يعني مسوي كيف مركز عليا اذا شافني اتاخرت وقت ما يكتبون الشباب رايتنج يسون شير ان تقدر  
تشوف  
مختار: هذا يوديني للسؤال اللي بعده انت ما كانت عندك مثلا تجارب كويسة ناحية المنتورينج انت شو تقترح مثلا كيف تخلي  
الاشياء اللي تقترح في التيتشر يصير مهتم فيك كطالب حتى تندمجوا في الكلية مثلا؟  
انت ذكرت قبل على موضوع الموفيز والاشياء  
(ط) اول شيء ياخذ الكلاس يشوفهم كلهم حله يشوف اللي ما حله يسير يشوف فيهم ليش انت ما حليت ليش ما سويت مب فاهم  
ليه مب فاهم كذا او كي يسير عند الثاني والثالث والرابع يعني يساعد اللي ما يعرف  
(ط) بس اهم شيء الاسلوب بقوله باسلوب حلو انت مثلا ما حليت خلاص بسجلك غياب ابسنت اوت اكثر كلمة سمعناها يمكن  
مختار: لكن شباب ما تحسوا انو الطالب مرات ما يسوي كونيكتشن مع التيتشر يحط حاجز بينه وبين هذا التيتشر صح ولا لا وما  
ينسى انه المصلحة العامة اللي هيا مصلحته هو كطالب ويقولك خلاص هذا التيتشر احي كلاس راح ابند  
(ط) اكيد الاستاذ هذا اعطينه انطباع ان هو شي يسوي  
(ط) ما غير وجهة نظر الطالب في نفسه  
مختار: ولكن انت هل الطالب المفروض يكون بروفشينال وقال انا قاعد مع هذا التيتشر سبع اسابيع لازم ادبر حالي مش يعني  
(ط) يفتح الحاجز يعني مثلا اذا مو عاجبه شيء في التيتشر يسير يكلمه مثلا  
مختار: ذكرتم انتم امثلة على السينما والاشياء اللي انتا ذكرتها قبل أو شو سويت في المول وكذا هل عندكم اقتراحات اكثر مثلا  
يكون فيه التيتشر مهتم في الطالب اكثر كطالب يعني امثلة اخرى مثلا يحتاج يكون فيه اكثر هذا المينتورينج لاني احس انه ما  
في كفاية من الاستاذ يهتم بالطالب كطالب حتى من الناحية الشخصية  
(ط) على ايام المدارس كان ينفصل عن الناس ما يختلط بالناس قاعد بروحه كل شيء حتى بالصف عندنا كم طالب قاعد  
بروحه في الصف عزابي يسير بقلهم سير شارك ويا هذا ادخل ويا هذا سير كذا عقب يعني ما يكلم الشخص هذا يكلم اللي كان  
قاعد معاهم شباب طلعا الولد وياكم كان ودوه السينما ودوه هالولد منعزل عنكم الولد يمكن ما يقدر ناقصتيه اشياء وما يقدر  
كيف يسويها بروحو ويستحي يطلبها منكم اختلطوا معاه  
مختار: وكيف في تنظيم الدرس يخلى الدرس يكون فيه يشتغلوا جروبات  
(ط) او انو يلصق الطاومات مثلا مع بعض  
مختار: او كي حلو اللغة في الموضوع هذا انه انت لما ترمس على اشياء شخصية مثلا مع التيتشر تحس انه في حاجز في اللغة  
لو كان يرمس عربي تكون فيه اريحة ولا عادي ؟  
(ط) اذا يتكلم عربي نص الكلام بيكون عربي ما بيتعلم شيء انجليزي  
مختار: مش بالكلاس

(ط) حتى لو كلام ثاني لان احنا يوم نتكلم كلام جانبي المس كانت تعلمنا اشياء انا بقولها اشياء انجبر عصب عني اتكلم وياها  
(ط) بتحفظ لان انت اللي تبي تفهم الموضوع  
(ط) عدلنا النظام في الكلاس انه هو ما بيا يسمع ولا كلمة عربي حتى ويا ربيعه  
(ط) تبا تسألها اسالها بالانجليزي  
مختار: يمكن لو سألت طلاب في لفل وان يكون الموضوع غير صح بيقولك انا حتى في الاكاديميك ادفيزنج ما يفهموا كثير  
(ط) لفل وان غير لانه ما يعرف شيء في الانجليزي تقريبا  
(ط) كيف يفهم على الاكاديميك صح  
مختار: فهذا المينتوريج العلاقة كيف تخلي الطالب يتم في الكلية العلاقة هذي التيتشر مهتم فيك كشخص هل عندها دور ان الطالب يحب يتم في الكلية  
(ط) تحس عمرك في مكان هم مهتمين فيك يعني انت مثلا بتسير مكان ما حد مهتم فيك اكي ما بتحب هالمكان ما تبي تكمل غير يوم تجي هني مثلا التيتشر يساعدك او ان يزورك يقولك انت ضعيف في هالشيء بياك تشد اكيد بتقول مهتمين في بقدر اتخرج  
(ط) ببسهل عليك  
(ط) يعني يفهمك ان انت ضعيف في هالشيء ما يحتاج تسوي فوكس في شيء انت قوي عليه يعني تضع وقتك يعني انت بتوفر وقتك وتتركز على شيء واحد وبتفهمه كل شيء بيكون سهل  
مختار: اوكي اخر سؤال عنكم اي اقتراحات المفروض احنا نسويها كتيتشرز احنا الموضوع هو التيتشر المفروض ما نسأل الادارة كذا تخلي تجربتك انت كطالب سنة اولى تكون لا هذي المرحلة حرجة في البحوث عالمياً الايام الاولى  
(ط) بتكون اصعب ايام لان انت جالس في مكان ما تعرف ولا شيء او ان ضعيف في هالشيء  
مختار: وليفش في رايمك تسرب الطلاب يصير كثير في السنة الاولى عالمياً  
(ط) ان يطلعون يعني؟  
(ط) لان يشوف يعني قدامه فلم وايد بدل ما بضيع هو اكثر شيء ان مب فاهم انه حين توا بيذا فيه يسير يدخل الجيش او يشتغل في اي مكان  
(ط) يعني الاربع سنوات اللي يدرس فيها يقدر خلال اربع سنوات يقدر يسوي وايد اشياء  
(ط) يحصل راتب يبنى نفسه يكون نفسه  
(ط) هو طبعاً لو معاه شهادة الشهادة اهم شيء اهم انك تدرس  
مختار: في رايمك التيتشر يعني لو الطالب عنده مشاكل يعني بس اسلوب التيتشر يخلي الطالب يتم في الكلية بغض النظر ان المشاكل اللي عنده عائلية او شخصية او صحية  
(ط) صح تائر وايد اكيد يعني مثلاً اذا انت الولد الوحيد في البيت وظروفك في البيت مثلاً لازم تجي تداوم تدرس فبيكون عليك ضغط تدرس وتداوم وتشوف اهلك  
مختار: وكيف التيتشر يخليك بغض النظر هذا المشاكل بتاعك يخليك تتم في الكلية وتواصل وتتج  
(ط) يساعدك يعني انت مثلاً تخلص من الدوام عندك ساعة ترد البيت تريح في هالساعة انت ما تلحق تجي الكلاس فتكلمه تقوله شيء استوالي يساعدك  
(ط) او مثلاً زحمة ترى شارع المطار وايد يستوي زحمة  
مختار: في اشياء صارت انكم تحسوا احنا قصرنا كادارة اتلعوست من موضوع مع التيتشر وقال ليفش ما يحلولىش المشكلة هذي  
(ط) لا الادارة ما تقصر  
(ط) ما يشوف انا في البداية يعني مثلاً يوم دشينا الفونديشن وما اعرف ولا حد بس ربعي كلهم في كلاسات ثانية حبيت اني اكون وياهم اشاركهم او ان تحسن انك غريب ما حد يحب يكون غريب فجلست كلاس بروحي وكنت يعني منعزل مثل ما تقولون ان لازم ما تنعزل تميت منعزل بروحي يمكن اسبوع او اسبوعين ما اعرف حد وطلبت من الادارة انها تغير مكاني حبيت اني اغير اكون ويا ربعي  
(ط) بس لو تقدرون مثلاً تخلون ان مثلاً في هالكلاس فيه واحد يبي يروح عالكلاس يغيرون الطلاب  
مختار: هي مرات مثلاً الطلاب مثلاً اللي ناجحين ما تحطهم مع الطلاب الجدد لانه مثلاً هاذو ما عندهم ولا فكرة عن السيكل ونشوف كمان درجات الامسات او درجات هذي حتى لو واحد مستواه هناك ومستوى هناك التيتشر يمكن يقضي وقت مع هذا اكثر  
وكن حبيت نتكلم صراحة لانه في اشياء الادارة قصرت لانه فيه التيتشر مثلاً لعوسني في امور كان مفروض الادارة

(ط) وربيعي بعد هو دش بزنيى واكونتنيج ومختارين الحصص غلط ان مال السنة الثالثة معطينه هو توا اول سنة هو مو بقادر يكمل يبغي شو وهو في نصف الشهر هالشيء غلط من التقنية يعني الادارة هنا المفروض يعدلون هالشيء غلط الواحد مش يبغي يضيع وقت على الفاضي بدل ما هو يسوي الشيء الصح يعني يطوف هالسيمستر يتأخر

**مختار:** انتم على فكرة استفدوا من هالتجربة لانه راح يكون عندكم نفس الشيء اكاديميك اديفزينج لما تنزلوا المواد

**مختار:** على فكرة هذا الفوكس جروب انا مسوي اربعة انا مسوي السنة اللي طافت هذي بس اخر يعني معلومات نضيفها سويت مع التيتشر بتاع التخصص وقالوا نفس الشيء قالوا في عندنا طالب سنة اولى ودارس مادة السنة الثالثة وبعدين يصير اشكالية او يحتاج مثلا رياضيات وان ومسوي رياضيات ثري هذي هي انتبهوا للموضوع

وعندي كمان فوكس جروب للطلاب اللي بتحكو عليهم اللي هم بالتخصص آت ريسك وعندي يعني جروبين تيتشر وجروبين طلاب خلاص خلاصنا جروب طلاب تيتشر وباقي جروب طلاب وجروب تيتشر

(ط) غيرنا نحنا

**مختار:** نعم اللي هم طلاب التخصص وتيتشر تخصص خلصت باقي تيتشر الفوائد حتى تاخذوا فكرة يعني نلم بجميع الموضوع من كل الجهات

المهم شباب بس الان خلاصة عندكم اي شيء يعني كلمة اخيرة على موضوع التيتشر تحبوا اللي هو موضوع التيتشر ذكرنا الاكاديميك اديفزينج والفورمال

(ط) البداية الساعة ثمانية انتو باديين ويا كل شيء ويا الدوام دوام المدراس العساكر المدنيين البلدية الجامعات كلكم نفس الوقت الساعة ثمانية

(ط) فاكيد زحمة

(ط) اساسا الغلط مو من التقنية

**مختار:** هذي انت لما تروح التخصص راح تختار

(ط) كل احد اتلعوس الصبح يعني اطلع من البيت الساعة ستة اول صوب التقنية قبل الكلاس ما بيبدأ بساعة لان اذا اتاخرت نصف ساعة الزحمة هذي بتذبجني بس يوم الاثنين امشى ثمانية ونصف اوصل 20 دقيقة بس

**مختار:** تعرف احنا عندنا عدد من الكلاسات وعدد من الطلاب لازم نحط كل كلاس طلاب من الساعة ثمانية حتى الساعة ثمانية فانتهم راح يكون عندكم حرية الاختيار تختاروا الجدول في الفونداشين صح مفيش خيار

كلمة اخير في موضوع دور التيتشر في تحفيز الطالب ويخليه يهتم في الكلية

(ط) قلنا يعني وايد اشياء صراحة بس ما في بعد شيء

**مختار:** يعني ما عندك شيء تضيفه

(ط) قفلت انا

شباب بس حبت اقولكم الان يعني ديس اذ اذ اند اوف ذا فوكس جروب يعني هذه هي النهاية اشكركم جزيل الشكر على ان انتم رضيتوا الدعوة

(ط) شيء اخير اذا شاف المدرس غلط على الطالب ما يحتاج سيدا يسير يكلم الادارة ويسوي يتفاهم معاه اول

**مختار:** والعكس حتى التيتشر

(ط) الطالب اذا شاف الاستاذ سوي شيء مب سيدا لا والله بشتكي عليك والله بسوي

(ط) بصراحة نص الاساتذة معذورين يعني الصراحة المس مالتنا تعبت صراحة كلاس كامل تتخرج تمسك منو ولا منو

مجبورة تشتكي اول بداية السيكل كنا ساكتين نص السيكل كل حد جالس يتكلم

(ط) والاستاذ يكون عنده كنترول اكثر عن المس

(ط) لا ما يخصه والله ما يخصه

**مختار:** ولكن لو التيتشر ما عندها كنترول تصير اشكالية

مختار: فشباب مشكورين ومرة ثانية اخيرة بس زي ما خبرتكم شباب هذي الريسيرش انت اي معلومات راح تكتب ما فيها لا اسمك ولا شيء ولكن في اي وقت انت تحب تقول انا ما احب اكون في هذي

(ط) هو عادي ما فيها مشكلة

**مختار:** هي هذي اجراءات تعرف الجامعات

## Appendix 10 - Focus Group 3 English Translation

**Researcher:** Ok, we are going to start. As you are aware, this focus group forms part of my doctoral thesis. Now, I will highlight the important points of the student information form. The topic of this research is (.....). Retention means that you stay in college and do not leave. We will look at examples of why students leave college. We will be here for an hour. As I told you, I will ask you questions about academic advising, mentoring and the role of the teacher in and outside the classroom. You are free to take part in this focus group. You are aware that you need to sign this consent form. You can leave this focus group at any time and you have the right to ask for your information to be withdrawn. This research will help us to better understand the role of the teacher in helping students, which hopefully will benefit other students who will join us in future. The data will be stored until the end of the research. Your names will be anonymous, meaning no one will know that you have said such and such. I will use pseudonyms to help me locate what was said.

### Formal Interaction

**Researcher:** The first question is about the role of the teacher inside the classroom. This is called formal interaction and is related to good teaching. What is a good teacher?

**Mubarak:** Someone who cares about the students.

**Researcher:** We are recording this as you know, so I would like you to speak clearly. In your opinion, what is a good teacher?

**Mubarak:** Someone who cares about the students.

**Researcher:** Ok guys. Talk. It is normal.

**Mubarak:** A good teacher is someone who focuses on all the students and sees what they need. They should not focus on only one student. They care about all their students. They check what this student needs and what the other student needs, and not only one or two students. For example, they shouldn't only focus on Abdulla for example, who has difficulty in writing, and Hamdan, who has difficulty in reading. They should focus on all the students.

**Researcher:** Have you ever noticed a teacher focusing on one or two students and forgets about the rest?

**All students:** Yes.

**Mubarak:** He forgets the clever students without realizing that the clever students don't know everything.

**Researcher:** If you were one of these clever students, how would that make you feel?

**Zayed:** It would make me feel as if something was missing.

**Sultan:** I will start missing classes. I wouldn't be interested in the class and I would start missing classes. Absences could lead to leaving college.

**Researcher:** Well done. You have made some very good points.

**Sultan:** My absences would increase and I would get dismissed from college and, as a result, no other government institution would accept me.

**Researcher:** Very nice. Anything else you would like to add?

**Sultan:** The good teacher needs to take into consideration the student's circumstances. If a student comes late to class, he should find out why the student is late.

**Researcher:** Takes care of students in terms of attendance. Anything else you would like to add about a good teacher?

**Mubarak:** A good teacher should not be a dictator, act like authority and treat the students harshly if they make mistakes and applies the rules. He need him to be nice with us and understands us for his kindness, but we do not respect him if he does not treat us nicely.

**Zayed:** He should also write a report about every little thing we do in class.

**Mubarak:** Not everything in class should be about learning. A teacher needs to be human after all.

**Zayed:** You have got a great mind Mubarak! Great ideas!

**Researcher:** What is your opinion Rashed about a good teacher?

**Rashed:** A teacher should act like a father or like a role model.

**Researcher:** What should a teacher do to have this role?

**Rashed:** If a student needs anything, they should go to their teacher.

**Zayed:** The teacher needs to be available for a student at all times.

**Researcher:** If the teacher sees that a student looks preoccupied or feeling low in class for whatever reason that is not necessarily related to class, he should support him and give him advice and not just study, study.

**Zayed:** The student might appear to be sick or something like that.

**Mubarak:** If the student appears sick, the teacher should give him advice.

**Zayed:** If a student is sick, the teacher should give them the advice to leave and go home.

**Researcher:** In your opinion, can a good teacher help a student be retained and achieve success?

**Zayed:** The main thing is that the teacher should not pressurise the student by having consecutive exams.

**Researcher:** What you mentioned in teaching, how?

**Mubarak:** The teacher must focus on our weaknesses and makes students love studying. The teacher should not demoralize the student by telling them that what they are being taught is difficult, but rather tells the student the opposite and explains the rules in a simplistic manner. For example, in mathematics, the teacher should begin with the easy content and then move on to more difficult content, rather than begin with the difficult content and see no progress in the student. It must be done step by step.

**Researcher:** In your opinion, does a good teacher have a role in retaining students?

**Mubarak:** Yes, because the teacher facilitates everything for me and makes me feel that college is not difficult. The teacher also makes me feel that I am capable of completing my studies until graduation.

**Zayed:** This is the teacher's job. They should not make you hate learning.

**Mubarak:** Even if you have difficulties in learning.

**Researcher:** How about the opposite. How can a teacher make you feel that leads you to wanting to leave college?

**Sultan:** Makes rules as he wishes, marks me absent for simple reasons, asks you to leave class and make you hate college.

**Researcher:** But if he marks you absent because he is required to apply college rules, what can he do?

**Zayed:** He needs to be lenient. For example, if I do not do my homework, he asks me to leave the class. Instead, he should let me complete the work in class so that I don't hate the lesson.

**Researcher:** Did you face issues like this?

**Mubarak:** If you don't do your homework, he asks to leave the class and complete the homework outside which makes you miss 10 minutes of the class trying to complete difficult homework and when you return to class, he marks you absent. He says I marked you absent because you were not in class, but he is the one who asked me to leave the class.

**Researcher:** Do you know of cases where a student left college because he had issues with a teacher?

**Sultan:** Yes, we had a student from our class.

**Researcher:** Without mentioning names please.

**Sultan:** Yes, he left because he could not understand anything in the Foundation Programme.

**Researcher:** His relationship with the teacher was not good?

**Sultan:** Because the teachers always asked him to leave the class.

**Mubarak:** A student had a valid reason for missing classes and every time he told the teacher that he has excuses at 1%, then he decided to leave knowing that he would get dismissed sooner or later when he reaches 15%.

**Researcher:** How about the teaching methodology? Students often talk about a teacher who makes you understand. What do you expect a good teacher to do in class?

**Sultan:** Becomes a friend to all students.

**Mubarak:** He makes you understand and becomes like a friend.

**Researcher:** For example, you are in class and when you leave, you say to yourself this was a good lesson. What happened during the lesson to make you feel that way?

**Mubarak:** The teacher explains the lesson in a simple way and avoids getting side tracked. For example, if he explains the multiplication table, he should explain to me how to get the results and avoid telling me the story of the multiplication table and how it was invented as this does not benefit me in any way.

**Researcher:** You mean practical and not just theoretical? What advice would you give your teacher in teaching and learning to help you stay in college and succeed?

**Rashid:** The same as what my colleague said. He should simplify this and help you understand and not give us too much work.

**Researcher:** Ok, simplifies, avoid too many details, and what else?

**Mubarak:** During class, for example, in 40 minutes of the lesson, if we finish before the 40 minutes, he should not keep us in class for the whole period and should let us go after 3 periods, so we can have a 10 or 15 minutes break.

**Zayed:** The main thing is that he makes us understand the lesson and whoever wants to leave can leave and whoever wants to stay can stay.

**Researcher:** Do you feel that teachers are preparing you for exams?

**Zayed:** The nice thing is not to have a routine or the teacher gives us questions which do not come in the exams.

**Researcher:** Is it important in your learning if a teacher speaks Arabic or just English?

**Zayed:** Yes.

**Mubarak:** It is better if he talks only English. In our class, for example, our teacher does not speak Arabic, but we loved her class and we rush to come to the class because we like this teacher. She helps correct our mistakes and explains to us what is right and what is wrong.

**Researcher:** Does this teacher use any Arabic words?

**Sultan:** She teaches words from her own language which is not English.

**Researcher:** So from what I understand, it does not matter whether your teacher speaks Arabic or not because you are learning in English that is a good point. Ok, formal interaction is linked to good teaching. Do you have anything else to add to this topic? What are some other characteristics of a good teacher? Let's focus on the classroom and we will deal with outside the classroom later.

**Rashid:** He uses different tools such as the internet.

**Researcher:** Technology, ok. Tell me about technology, how does it make you engaged in class?

**Rashid:** We have an application like Kahoot.

**Mubarak:** In Foundation, they give us the last 15 minutes of the lesson to do Kahoot activities, and sometimes they give us a YouTube story or an activity with questions that we answer by ourselves and the teacher gives pre-prepared worksheets to write our answers, we cover a lot of materials like this.

**Researcher:** This is the role of technology. If you compare between the days of the textbooks and now, everything is available online. Do you think technology makes the student more engaged?

**Mubarak:** Everything is easier with YouTube. Instead of handwriting 500 words, we write faster and put in less effort when we learn through YouTube.



**Researcher:** You used to use iPads. Does it make a difference whether you have an iPad or laptops?

**Sultan.** There is a difference. We feel that the laptop is easier.

**Researcher:** It's easier to save documents.

### Informal Interaction

**Researcher:** Let's now look at informal interaction. I will explain to you what informal interaction is. Informal interaction is about having the opportunity to talk or communicate with your teacher about academic and non- academic matters. For example, at the end of a lesson, or meeting them outside the classroom like in the car park or the cafeteria, or sending them emails. The first question is... what type of informal interaction happens between you and your teachers? Start by giving some examples.

**Mubarak:** First, it depends on his age. If it is an older man, we treat him like a father only. If it is a younger teacher, we treat them like a friend. It is normal to see him as one of us, but respect between us remains.

**Researcher:** Regardless whether he is older or younger, the respect remains. Give me examples on how you engage with your teacher in matters like these. The informal ones.

**Zayed:** Before, there was a teacher, without mentioning names, he was taking the mickey. He said, in a sarcastic way, how come the three of you are going out together. I don't know how you can respect this teacher. How you look at him and how he can be responsible for me and how should I view this teacher. How he can joke about us ....

**Researcher:** Ok, you said that the teacher was joking, give me other examples of this interaction even in the class during breaks. Give me examples of how, for example, you communicated with the teacher about things which are not relevant to your studies?

**Zayed:** When we ask teachers questions about how to talk with a girl in English? The teacher explains how?

**Mubarak:** Or talks about sports or something like that.

**Zayed:** Like jokes.

**Researcher:** Yes, jokes. Sitting with a teacher in the cafeteria, for example, drink a coffee together.

**Sultan:** I don't know what they want. Once they finish the class, they run away.

**Researcher:** They hide in C Block. Ok, do you think that you need more informal interaction with the teacher? Do you like to sit with your teacher informally?

**Sultan:** Yes, you feel more relaxed.

**Researcher:** How does this make you engaged with college when you interact informally with your teacher?

**Rashid:** You respect him and you respect each other.

**Sultan:** You don't want to tell them things they don't like and you also expect that they don't take the mickey out of you.

**Researcher:** Ok, other examples where a teacher is like a friend and how that makes you like being in the college.

**Zayed:** The teacher needs to understand young people and talk about things that young people like, bearing in mind that all students are 18 or 19.

**Sultan:** He should not talk about subjects for old people like his age.

**Researcher:** Do they talk to you about topics for young people or rarely?

**Sultan:** Rarely.

**Researcher:** If there was more informal interaction, would that be better?

**Zayed:** Yes, better and the student becomes less shy and he feels that a teacher is like a friend.

**Researcher:** Give examples of things that you wish to have between you and the teacher?

**Rashid:** WhatsApp, emails.

**Researcher:** For a class, for example.

**Mubarak:** Before the final SAT exam, we were all suffering as a class and we did not know what to study exactly. We don't have the teacher's phone number; we don't know what to revise and we entered the exam with our luck and only three students passed from our class. Me and him and another student. Only us and the rest failed because they didn't know what to revise. They open millions of pages and they don't know where to start and where to finish and they don't know anything.

**Researcher:** At what level did you start college?

**Zayed:** level 4; **Sultan:** Level 2; **Mubarak:** Level 3; **Rashid:** Level 3.

**Researcher:** Did you start in January? My research topic, as you know, is about first year students, so we are talking about things which are related to you as a first-year student. Things like your

relationship with the teacher. What things should we take into consideration, especially when you are a new student?

**Mubarak:** When you are new arrival, you don't understand anything. They should explain to you everything about college. The minute we entered college, or teacher is always saying "I will do this and will do that", all threats. From the moment he sees you, he makes you explode until morning, but when we get the second teacher, we work a lot and she smiles and she makes us love the class and the college.

**Sultan:** He does not even give us a break.

**Mubarak:** He used to join two periods which makes you bored of learning and you don't want to study and your brain goes elsewhere. The teacher was hard on us from the first week.

**Zayed:** He pushes the students and gives the break later. No. We want to be like other classes and have our break at the regular time.

**Sultan:** During the 10-minute break, you want to see your mates from other classes. This makes you hate a teacher more.

**Researcher:** You mentioned examples of how a teacher can make you want to leave. What is your advice to this teacher?

**Sultan:** The college needs to talk to the teacher and someone talk to the teacher without mentioning my name.

**Mubarak:** The teacher tries to get closer to the students and tries to make him understand in his way and, maybe, this angers the student. If a teacher sees that the student is not comfortable, he should back off or change his method and should not stick to the same method, but he insists on the same method of teaching. Some students are happy and are okay that the teacher gives a longer break towards the end of a double period, but the majority don't like this. He should take into consideration the opinion of the majority and apply it, and not just as he wants and what the minority likes.

**Researcher:** Do you mean that the teacher should give you give all the information in your first few days at college. Do you think that some teachers did not do enough in your early days at the college? And what type of information did you need?

**Mubarak:** How to use Blackboard, how to communicate with the teacher through email and what to do if we need anything. They should teach us how to use BB9, how to check our grades, our schedules, and how to check our grades after an exam.

**Researcher:** Did you feel that you did not know these things at the beginning?

**Mubarak:** It took us a long time before we knew what Blackboard was and what is BSS. I knew nothing. I relied on students to teach me how BSS works and how to access my college email.

**Sultan:** Schedule.

**Researcher:** Who explained this to you?

**Mubarak:** Our teachers explained to us but it took a long time.

**Researcher:** Obviously if you knew right from the beginning that would have been better.

**Zayed:** They explained to me on the first day.

**Researcher:** Did you attend the orientation programme?

**Mubarak:** I did not attend.

**Zayed:** I attended the first day.

**Researcher:** The issue is that a large number of students do not attend. Sometimes only around 30% attend and when they come, they are disorientated and teachers are having to spend a long time explaining to them things like accessing schedules.

**Rashid:** When I sorted my first class, they just asked to enter Backboard and started doing activities.

**Researcher:** Now we have spoken about how the teacher makes you motivated and engaged, and he helps you succeed and stay in college. Can you give me examples?

**Zayed:** To have better self-confidence, I suggest having a sharing learning group so you feel involved with your colleagues.

**Mubarak:** A section sharing group or a group with another section.

**Researcher:** You mean a study group where you learn collaboratively? Nice idea.

**Rashid:** I see that communication should be continuous.

**Researcher:** How do you suggest that this communication should happen?

**Sultan:** It is better if he gives us his mobile.

**Rashid:** By email, WhatsApp or they do something better than the email by asking the teacher to give us his number.

**Researcher:** You mean his mobile. Teachers usually like to have certain limits to the type of communication they have with their students.

**Mubarak:** Maybe I can phone him at 4:00 am!

**Researcher:** Or what if a student starts sending photos and the relationship becomes out of control? Unless we say this WhatsApp group is just for issues related to the studies.

**Zayed:** Correct, a WhatsApp group which is specific for class work only.

**Mubarak:** Yes, it needs criteria. For example, we have swapped a cardroom, we have gone here or there.

**Researcher:** This is from a motivation point of view. Motivation means that a student is motivated and excited. What does a good teacher do to make you motivated?

**Mubarak:** He tell you about things he did. For example, he says I went to the Ski mall and had a good time and so on. This makes the students feel motivated and talk about the games in the Mall, students like these types of discussions, why not we all go and try.

**Researcher:** You mean that students should be given the opportunity to talk in class about topics of their interest. Apart from the mall games, what else?

**Sultan:** He gives us his opinion about these places. If he goes to the mall or to the desert, he tells us about his experience.

**Researcher:** Not start the class with Blackboard lesson?

**Mubarak:** When a teacher enters the class, he should greet the students and chat a little, then he starts the lesson. Not start a BB9 lesson the minute he walks in class.

**Sultan:** The first ten minutes should be a general chat which gives the late students a chance to arrive.

**Researcher:** Do you mean he should talk about your weekend? This makes you feel...

**Sultan:** Especially on Sundays.

**Researcher:** Ok, you have answered this question. Now, let's move to the third question which is academic advising.

### **Academic Advising**

**Researcher:** Academic advising is the session you have with your teacher and I at the beginning and end of each cycle. We give you information about each cycle/level, your assessment, and what academic advising entails. In your major, academic advising is when an advisor sits with you and explains what courses you should choose to meet the requirements for graduation. But in Foundations, academic advising is different. It is about the information we give you as mentioned earlier when you meet with the teacher to discuss your progress and how you can succeed. The

question now... what is your experience of academic advising in college? For example, how many sessions did you have? How was your relationship with your teacher during the advising session? Did you benefit from the session? etc.

**Rashid:** A student who needs advice from an academic advisor needs to know what major he wants.

**Researcher:** The teacher should give you information about the programme you want.

**Rashid:** The advice needs to be about the major, and shouldn't ask irrelevant questions.

**Sultan:** An advising session shouldn't be too long, so a student doesn't get bored. They could divide it day by day for example, or week by week. They also need to tell you about other programmes so you don't get bored.

**Sultan:** Or half an hour about each programme.

**Mubarak:** It should talk about important things that we understand.

**Researcher:** What do you suggest then?

**Sultan:** The most important thing is that we don't have academic advising late. Because when you have late afternoon class, you are tired and bored. They should give you advising in the first class. They could cancel a class to do advising in the morning and not late afternoon.

**Researcher:** Apart from this issue of major, do you feel like we have given you enough information about academic advising? Or did you feel...because we are the only college that gives one to one academic advising sessions, just like we did last cycle, when all of you came to the multipurpose hall. Did you understand what a cycle means and how the programme is designed? Number of weeks, exam period, holidays? And how do you pass your exams?

**Sultan:** In our class we have got the schedule of the cycle and the assessment schedule was not very clear.

**Researcher:** And later we clarified it by printing it bigger and in colour. It is also available on blackboard.

**Sultan:** The teachers themselves tell us you have got this number of weeks left at the beginning of each class.

**Researcher:** Tell me about the academic advising that took place between you and the teacher. The one to one session with your teacher where they tell you about your grades and quizzes. What was your impression of this session?

**Sultan:** For example, when we have the one to one session, the teacher would tell us “this is your grade for reading” and where we have weaknesses, they tell us examples of where we can improve our reading skills and how to read better.

**Zayed:** You enter Blackboard and you find everything there to improve where you have weaknesses.

**Researcher:** Did you benefit from this?

**Sultan:** A lot. Otherwise how would we have passed foundation? I had a problem in writing and the teacher gave me worksheets and wrote for me a whole paragraph, and during the SAT exam we had a similar paper in writing.

**Researcher:** How many academic advising sessions did you have in a cycle?

**Sultan:** It was only the afternoon learning centre sessions.

**Researcher:** Administratively we require to complete two academic advising sessions each cycle. One with me in the MPH and one with the teacher one to one. How did you benefit from your one to one session with the teacher?

**Mubarak:** We benefitted a lot from the one to one session because to start with, I did not concentrate on certain points for example writing and during the one to one session the teacher gave me advice step by step. When I finish one point she would start with a different point. For example, she would say the ‘i’ should be capital. She benefited me with lots of things, and as a result I got more than 1075.

**Sultan:** The good thing is that she knows you better than you know yourself.

**Researcher:** They mean she knows your level. You mean that you benefited from the one to one session because the teacher concentrated on points that are specific to you instead of addressing common points. Ok, now, in your opinion, this academic advising that we do, how does it affect student retention? If you didn't have this academic advising, do you think you would have passed? Does this advising have a role in your success?

**Sultan:** This depends on your luck, because you don't know your weak points. The teachers guide you.

**Zayed:** First time I sat the exam, I failed because I did not know my mistakes and no one told me what they were.

**Mubarak:** This means you concentrate on one thing where you have difficulty. I had difficulty in writing and without the teacher I couldn't have focused on reading, vocabulary, writing and

grammar. I could have failed because I am already ok in reading and vocabulary and all I needed help with were writing and grammar. They were my weakest skills. Without the academic advising I would have focused on all these skills and maybe I would have failed. But because of the academic advising session, and the guidance of the teacher, I focused on writing and grammar and feel like I've improved as a result.

**Researcher:** Let me ask you another question. You came to foundation because you didn't have the right English grades (at-risk). What was the reason for that?

**Sultan:** In our school they bring you teachers who don't understand English, because in those schools the majority of the students are not well educated. Most students act like children in class. Sometimes they fight and don't pay attention.

**Mubarak:** The teacher would walk in class and doesn't remember what he taught you and what he didn't, and tells you at the end of the month "I'll get my salary", and doesn't focus on the students.

**Rashid:** The teacher, during our school days, did not pay attention or care about students.

**Mubarak:** All he did was write on the board, wipe the board and repeat that. They don't care if students understand or don't understand. Completely careless.

**Zayed:** Even the military service affected us. Spending a whole year without learning affected our standards.

**Researcher:** Did it affect you negatively?

**Zayed:** A lot. Because you are studying for all these years and then you stop learning for a whole year. You are cut off from learning and you don't get a connection with anything called English, everything is in Arabic.

**Zayed:** You are not allowed to use your mobile, or write on your mobile or write with your hands. You get one-week holiday and, even if you had time to read or write, you don't feel like it.

**Sultan:** It means that during the military service we forgot our family, and how can we not forget English.

**Researcher:** What if they gave you some English classes while you are in the military service?

**Sultan:** That would be better.

**Zayed:** I don't think it would have been a good idea. If they put us in a classroom everyone will be asleep because we are so tired. You wake up at 3 am in the morning and then you go to sleep at 9 pm. You sleep 5 hours a day.



**Researcher:** What is the solution with this issue? Students are forgetting a lot while in the military service. What do you suggest?

**Mubarak:** True, he forgets a lot. But he prefers studying than military service and the student will say “once I leave the military service I will go to college, work hard, and start from zero”. Yes, he would have forgotten, but he has determination.

**Researcher:** In some countries if you pass high school, they allow you to join a university and then you do your military service when you graduate. Students who don’t pass their high school certificate go to the army. In these countries, only about 50% of the students pass.

**Zayed:** I think like Japan or Korea.

**Researcher:** I don’t know if Japan is like that.

**Mubarak:** Even here, if you fail the first time, they allow you to repeat. If you fail a second time, they send you to the army.

**Researcher:** Talking about military service, do you think you are more disciplined?

**Zayed:** I agree. That is one good thing about military service.

**Researcher:** Between us, teachers feel like there is a great difference between students before the military service and after the military service.

**Sultan:** Yes, we learn respect so that everyone respects everybody.

**Zayed:** You build your personality.

**Researcher:** About this topic of English at school, which made you come to college underprepared. Is there anything similar which is related to mathematics?

**Mubarak:** We also need maths for business.

**Rashid:** Accounting or...

**Researcher:** What is difficult about maths?

**Mubarak:** Now I have learnt things that I did not know. I did not concentrate at school about what the teacher was teaching. Now, we have control over our learning through using laptops and computers and we have the option to skip questions that we don’t know and the teacher will explain it to us later. The good thing about this online learning is that it allows you to repeat the question more than one time. We might get it right on the fourth time, for example. If you are missing a question you can go back to it until the point is stuck in your mind, then you move on to the next question.

**Zayed:** And the teacher gives you examples.

**Researcher:** About the topic of maths, was the issue at school the same that you faced in English? Because of the teacher? Or did you learn maths in a different language for example?

**Sultan:** At school, most of us were in government schools. This means that maths was in Arabic. When we came here, everything was in English.

**Researcher:** You are all studying maths in Arabic?

**Sultan:** Some of us studied in English.

**Mubarak:** Just because we did not pay attention in class. Because at school, the teacher doesn't help struggling students and only focuses on the smart ones who get even better and the weak ones are left behind. The teacher would say "the failing student will always remain a failure".

**Researcher:** Were you in Scientific or Arts stream?

**Zayed:** Scientific.

**Researcher:** All of you?

**Mubarak:** No, I was in Art.

**Researcher:** My understanding is that you have benefited from the academic advising sessions, but what are your suggestions for improving them? What kind of advice would you give your teachers to make them better?

**Sultan:** Frankly, I don't recommend that the session should be too long, and it shouldn't be in late afternoons because most students would not come.

**Researcher:** The timing is an issue?

**Mubarak:** For example, if we have three sessions on Tuesday from nine until one, we suggest cancelling 12 to 1 classes and dedicate it to academic advising. It is better than giving us a break from 1 to 2 and then scheduling the academic advising at 2.

**Researcher:** Okay, so it's the timing. What if we gave you more time instead of just 5 minutes during the session?

**Sultan:** To be honest, the duration of the academic advising session was enough.

**Researcher:** You mean you just needed some brief guidance.

**Sultan:** Not just 5 minutes. It could be enough but the advisor could give you longer if you have more issues compared to other students. Academic advisors shouldn't just give you five minutes then let you go, especially if you have a lot of difficulties and queries.

**Researcher:** Apart from the timing, do you suggest, for example, having the academic advising sessions in the morning rather than in the afternoon? The report card is a new thing which we have

started giving students at the end of the last academic year. Before, the teacher would just meet the students by looking at a spreadsheet which has their grade. Have you now benefited from this report card, which makes you come to the meeting prepared for where you are at?

**Sultan:** Good idea. What you have done is a good thing.

**Researcher:** What if academic advising was delivered by an admin person, not a teacher?

**Mubarak:** Students have different views about academic advising. Some students say that academic advisors are good and give them good advice, and others say the opposite. Some say that their academic advisors talk too much about things that are not relevant. All students want is someone that gives them the right information and that's it. "You need to do such and such. You need to work hard. Your grades are low in this subject, you need to improve them", and lets you go and doesn't get sidetracked in irrelevant discussions. Some students might not have the time for this side discussion.

**Researcher:** You mean get straight to the point and give me what I need. Do you feel the academic advisors are getting sidetracked?

**Mubarak:** I am okay but sometimes the academic advisor starts talking about what they've been doing during the weekend and the student is in a hurry and only answers the questions out of respect.

**Researcher:** But this is during class time.

**Mubarak:** Yes, it's in the class time but...

**Researcher:** You mean, you finish and go. If the academic advising is done by a person that is not your teacher, do you think this is better?

**Sultan:** No, because you know the teacher. If you see someone for the first time and he is not your teacher, you might not feel relaxed.

**Mubarak:** Your teacher knows you better. If someone else comes and says that I've done such and such and haven't done such and such, it's different from your teacher. You can agree or disagree with them. If a teacher who doesn't teach me comes and says that my writing is not okay, I can say that "No, it's okay", because my teacher marks my writing on a daily basis and I know she's right, so I won't argue with her. And when she gives me advice, I'll accept it from her, not from a teacher who doesn't know me.

**Researcher:** Is there a difference if your adviser spoke Arabic or English, or it doesn't matter?

**Sultan:** I think in Arabic it is better, so you can understand better. Because now in foundation, you don't know a lot of English. If the advisor uses difficult words that you don't understand, you might miss the point.

### **Mentoring**

**Researcher:** Let's talk about our last topic, which is mentoring. Let me explain to you what mentoring means. Mentoring is the next step after academic advising. Mentoring means that the teacher takes care of the student, not just from the academic side, but even beyond. This means there is a relationship between the teacher and the student. It could be about other things like what you did during the weekend, or sends you emails, which could also be about your studies.

**Mubarak:** I accept mentoring from all teachers, but some teachers might not want this relationship.

**Researcher:** Mentoring is about the teacher caring about you as a whole. Give me examples of mentoring that happened between you and your teacher.

**Zayed:** You mean examples of how the teacher cares about us?

**Researcher:** Yes. Not just about your studies, but cares about you as a person, for example.

**Sultan:** For example, once I was feeling low in class and my teacher came to me and asked if I was okay today and I told her that everything is okay, but she insisted to know if everything is okay. This is an example.

**Researcher:** Yes, a good example.

**Zayed:** And coming late to class, when the teacher asks "is everything is okay, why are you late?".

**Sultan:** So the teacher knows that the student is never late and when he is late, it's good to ask why the student is late. For example, she would ask "Do you have any issues?".

**Rashid:** That way she doesn't penalise you and your relationship becomes more positive.

**Researcher:** You mean the teacher cares not about your grades, but about you as a person.

**Rashid:** Some teachers, you can tell them that you are late because of traffic, but they don't understand, which makes you angry.

**Rashid:** It's nice when the teacher cares about the students,

**Researcher:** Do you have other examples that show caring teacher?

**Sultan:** Just like with coming late and the teacher is concerned and asked, that shows caring.

**Researcher:** Give me other examples of how the teacher cares about you as a student.

**Sultan:** You mean, an incident that happened to me?

**Researcher:** Yes, the same as the example of when you were feeling low and the teacher asked you if everything was okay.

**Zayed:** Once, I sat in class and I didn't do any work and I was daydreaming. When the class finished and all the students left, the teacher came to me and asked why I hadn't done any work during the lesson. He advised me to go to the portal to do some vocab exercises. If I hadn't had advice like this, I wouldn't have passed. Since he gave me that advice, I started working with him during my break and as a result, I passed. If the teacher didn't show this care, I wouldn't have concentrated during my English classes.

**Sultan:** I did not have a situation like this.

**Researcher:** You did not have any situation like this?

**Mubarak:** No, when I finished my class, I leave.

**Researcher:** No, this could happen even during the class.

**Mubarak:** In my case, during class, I always participate and do my work.

**Researcher:** So, you don't have a negative experience where you felt like the teacher didn't care?

**Mubarak:** No, I feel that he cares about me. When he sees that I am late, he finds me a student who can guide me about my writing, for example.

**Researcher:** This leads me to the next question, what do you suggest that teachers should do to improve mentoring and become more caring about you as a student, so that you can become more engaged? You mentioned before things like movies.

**Mubarak:** Teachers should walk around the class and check who has completed the work and who hasn't, and ask why students haven't completed the work. Maybe the students who haven't completed the work don't understand, and if he doesn't understand, why not? Then going to the second third and fourth students, by helping those who don't understand.

**Sultan:** The main thing is that he approaches them in a proper manner and shouldn't mark you absent just because you did not do your work or says "Out of the class". Which is a phrase we frequently hear.

**Researcher:** Don't you feel that, sometimes, it's the student that doesn't connect with the teacher and builds a barrier with him and the teacher, and forgets about his interests as a student, and says "Okay, every time I come to this class, I will build a break wall with the teacher"?

**Zayed:** Yeah, but we are trying to convey the message to the teacher that what he is doing is wrong.

**Sultan:** The teacher is not changing the student's views about him.

**Researcher:** The students should be professional, especially if you know that you're going to be with this teacher for eight weeks.

**Zayed:** That is how it should be.

**Sultan:** Yes, I agree. The students should approach the teacher and talk to him if he is not happy about something.

**Researcher:** You mentioned examples about the cinema, and other things you mentioned earlier like "What did you do in the mall?". Do you have other suggestions that show care from a teacher? Things that show that the teacher cares about the student as a whole.

**Zayed:** During our school days, the student would isolate himself from people and would sit by himself in class. The student sits in isolation. The teacher should get that quiet student involved and get him to work with other students, and advise other students to socialise with him, like taking him to the cinema. Because the student might have some social difficulties and might not know how to approach friendships, and this is better coming from the teacher.

**Researcher:** What about in the lesson organisation, like collaborative work?

**Sultan:** Yes. For example, the teacher would arrange the table so that we are sitting in groups.

**Researcher:** Okay. Good idea. When you are talking about personal matters with the teacher, do you feel like language is a barrier? Do you feel it would be better if the teacher spoke in Arabic?

**Mubarak:** If he spoke in Arabic, half the talking would be in Arabic, so the students would not understand anything.

**Researcher:** Not in class?

**Sultan:** Even if it's not related to class, because when we do this side talking with the teacher, we learnt a lot because she uses words and phrases that I made an effort to understand.

**Zayed:** You make an effort because you are interested in what the teacher is saying and you want to understand.

**Sultan:** We have a rule in our class. The teacher doesn't want to hear any arabic words in the class, even if you are talking to your colleague.

**Mubarak:** If you want to ask a question to the teacher, you ask in English.

**Researcher:** Maybe if I asked this question to students in level 1, the answer would be different, right? They might say that even in academic advising, they don't understand much.

**Sultan:** Level 1 is different because students in that level don't understand a lot of English.

**Mubarak:** How can he understand academic advising sessions?

**Researcher:** Do you think mentoring has an impact on student retention? If a teacher cares about a student as a person, do you think that might make him stay in college?

**Sultan:** You feel like you're in a place where people care about you. If you go somewhere, for example, where people don't care about you, you don't want to stay in that place, you don't want to stay even for one day. When this teacher comes to help you, or another teacher comes and says "Do you need help in this particular skill?", it makes you feel that they care and make you believe that yes, you can graduate from this college.

**Zayed:** He makes things easier for you.

**Mubarak:** He makes you understand that you have weaknesses in certain areas, so you don't waste time and you save time by concentrating on one thing, which will make things easier for you.

**Researcher:** Okay, last question. Do you have any suggestions that teachers could do during this crucial first year experience, which research highlights as an important year?

**Sultan:** Yes, these are difficult days because you are sitting in a place that you don't know.

**Researcher:** Why do you think that there is a lot of student attrition in the first year?

**Sultan:** You mean the students leave college?

**Zayed:** Because he feels like he has a long path ahead of him and instead of wasting his time in a place that he does not understand, he seeks other opportunities like going to the army or getting a job somewhere.

**Sultan:** This means that he could do a lot in the four years that he is spending at college.

**Zayed:** He could get a salary and start a life, and builds his future.

**Sultan:** Of course, if he has a degree it's better. It's better that you study.

**Researcher:** What's your opinion about the teacher? Do you think that even a student has problems that could lead him to leave? A caring teacher might make him change his mind, regardless of the type of problem he has. Personal, family, or health?

**Sultan:** Yes, it has a lot of effect on this. For example, if you are the only boy in your family, and you have to both study and work, you are under pressure of studying and seeing your family.

**Researcher:** What's the effect of the teacher after all these problems and makes you stay?

**Rashid:** He would help you and understand you. If you are working with a student and go home for an hour to relax and then come late to college, you speak to him about attendance that is caring.

**Mubarak:** Or for example, if there is traffic. Airport road is always busy.

**Researcher:** Have there been times where you feel that the college administration did not help you with your relationship with the teacher?

**Mubarak:** No, administration is doing its best.

**Zayed:** When I first came to foundation and I knew nobody except a few friends who were in another class, I requested to move to their class because I was feeling lonely in my class. No one wants to be lonely, sitting by themselves in a class. I was isolated. You say that you shouldn't be isolated, but I was for a week or two, not knowing anybody. I asked administration to move me to the other class to be with my friends, but they refused.

**Sultan:** Administration should allow students to move classes if they want to be with other students.

**Researcher:** What happens is that sometimes when students pass from a level to another, we don't put them with students who have just arrived, so we can help them better. We also look at their grades. If the students' grades are high, we try to not put them with students with lower grades, so that the teacher can help the students better. I want you to be honest, is there any time where you felt that you have had issues with administration or teachers did not help you resolve the issues?

**Zayed:** My friend. They entered an accounting programme and was shown the wrong courses of the third year. He's struggling and cannot change because he is half way. This is wrong and administration should resolve his issues. He is doing nothing, he is just waiting for a whole semester because of an administrative error in course registration.

**Researcher:** This is a good point. You need to learn these experiences. You will have to go through the same process when you enter your major. By the way, I have three other focus groups in addition to this one. One with teachers from the programme, one with foundation teachers and one with the students from the programme. We've had cases of students who are registered in a higher-level math before a lower level math, or doing courses of second year when they are in first year, so you need to watch out for this.

**Zayed:** Okay, so do you have another focus group with other students?

**Researcher:** Yes, students who are in Programme, teachers who are in Programme and teachers who are in Foundation so that I have a good idea of all the topics in all areas. Okay so just to sum



up, does anyone have any questions about the roles of teachers relating to academic advising, mentoring and formal and informal interaction?

**Mubarak:** Teachers expect us to start at 8 o'clock, regardless of our situation. Everyone in society starts at eight. School starts at eight, military starts at eight, everyone starts work at eight.

**Zayed:** Of course, you should expect traffic. The issue is from the college.

**Researcher:** When you join your major, you can choose your own schedule.

**Mubarak:** Everyone is suffering in the morning. I leave my house at 6 am, way before class time. Because if I leave half an hour later, I get stuck in traffic. Only on Mondays, I leave at 8:30 and arrive at college 20 minutes later.

**Researcher:** The college has a large number of sessions, and students and all classrooms must be utilised from 8:00 in the morning to 8 in the evening. Remember that you will have the choice to choose your schedule once you leave foundation. Last words relating to the teacher motivating the students and engaging them?

**Sultan:** I think we have said a lot; I don't have anything else to add.

**Researcher:** Okay, this is the end of the focus group. I thank you very much for accepting the invitation and for the time you have spent during this meeting.

**Mubarak:** I suggest that if a teacher has a negative remark about a student, they shouldn't go directly to administration, they should go to the students first.

**Researcher:** I suggest the opposite as well.

**Mubarak:** Yes, because if a student sees that a teacher has made a mistake, he shouldn't just go to the administration and complain.

**Sultan:** To be honest, half the teachers have the right to be strict with us. I don't blame our teacher if they complain about some students in our class, especially when students chat a lot in class. When a teacher complained at the beginning of the cycle, things got better.

**Zayed:** The male teacher should have a better control of the class than the female teacher.

**Mubarak:** No, I don't agree that a male teacher should have better control.

**Researcher:** The main problem is if any teacher does not have control. Okay, thank you again, but as I told you, the information you have given in this research will not include your name and if you would like to withdraw your information, just let me know.

**Sultan:** It's okay, there is no problem.

**Researcher:** I just want to remind you of the university regulations.

## Appendix 11 – Focus Group 5 Transcript

### 11. Focus Group 5 Transcript

**Researcher:** So do you have any questions about anything that you've read? It's all clear? So you can withdraw even after this, it's part of the ethical clearance.

**Alan:** Yeah.

#### Informal Interaction

**Researcher:** Okay. Just moving on now to what I'm trying to do. Basically my research is on engaging, uh, at risk students and that's mainly first year with the topic of the conference. And we are looking specifically, I've already done data analysis. This is just some additional data in specific area, which is the role of the teacher in assisting plus the impact of the teacher on first year at risk students. So, , I have done a similar one scene in a focus group with teachers from programmes because our students are different because they need the English and that's why they're at risk. So I thought rather than having a mixed group, it's better to get richer data from. okay., so now going to the questions I'll be asking you questions about the role of teacher as an advisor, as a mentor, and as a teacher, which is formal interaction and also as the informal interaction. And I've explained those terms and what they mean. Okay. So, starting with, really quickly we're going to start with the teacher - the informal interaction between the student and the teacher. First of all, let me just define what I mean by informal interaction. Informal interaction basically refers to the type of communication that happens between you and the students that could be in the classroom or could be outside of the class. So, like having a coffee, if you meet students in the corridor, in the cafeteria. So all that goes under the informal interaction. It could be something which is academic like, talking about, you know, communication through email or whatsapp. So the question for you now, what type of informal interaction you have with students? Maybe give us some examples.

**Patricia:** I would say in my case, usually the informal interactions they are after class or during the break. They expressed their concerns regarding what they, they think they are not doing right and they, they are constantly asking for example, what they can do. They ask for advice, those kinds of things. In between. They say they talk about all the things, but they also want to know

what they can do and apart from what they are already doing in the classroom. Yeah, to improve. I mean we eh, I usually have this conversation with them that what they can do, but I don't really know if they do anything after, you know, because they are always approaching and they want to know what else they can do. But from my part, Eh, I don't follow that up. I don't ask the students did you do what I told you to do or what are you doing to, to improve. So there's the conversation is in there, the interaction is in there after but there isn't any follow up on that. So I don't know if that -

**Researcher:** Okay, so basically about their studies. Anything else?

**Zainab:** I do catch up with them on what they are up to during the breaks, usually they'll be sharing about their pets or a concert they are going next weekend. I think that actually builds rapport and shows how comfortable they are with you. And sometimes this is the time for you to talk about the issues that's happening outside classroom which explains their behaviour in the classroom itself. Apart from saying hi and bye in the corridor. I think if you start really early with them and you have a good relationship with your students, they will still come and consult you even after they have finished foundation, they have started their program - in fact they would at least still come and ask for your opinion or they'll come by your office to ask about a subject and whatnot. I think it consists, I think it's part of what you're talking about in terms of informal interaction.

**Researcher:** Okay.

**Zainab:** It can be your ex-students as well.

**Researcher:** Alan?

**Alan:** I'd say most of the informal interaction is bumping into them, meeting, greeting them. Whether it's just before classes. Students that you had maybe in a different section. I see a lot in and around H block, and they walk up to you, start talking to you. The nature is quite casual because you're not in a teaching or learning environment. That's when you get to know them because you're talking about, could be sports, football. Once they know what you're interested in as well, they like to ask you questions. So you get to know them in a nicer, casual way.

**Researcher:** Okay so more or less. Different type from- you don't have to, all of you, answer the same question. If you don't have anything to say. But maybe Paul is similar.

**Paul:** yeah, I think so. Yeah, I agree that informal interaction gives good rapport and establishing a cordial relationship with the students makes your job easier. When the time comes for you to ask them to do something, you can sort of use the culture to your advantage a little bit if you establish a positive relationship, it becomes easier to negotiate changes in behaviour that you want to see.

**Researcher:** Very nice. Okay. And you've already answered for me the next question. So you mentioned about the form of examples of the informal interaction. Now the next question, which Paul has just answered is that what's the impact, does it have an impact on student retention and success?

**Alan:** I think it does, I think they're happier. They feel more comfortable, they can relaxed and there's a time to be formal and there is a time to be informal. And then when you really need to get them to engage in their studies, you can use that to your advantage because you built a rapport with them.

**Researcher:** Yeah.

**Alan:** If you're cold and standoffish, you won't get that response from a student. You need to have a, well for a better definition, like a bigger brother and an uncle time role for these students and they do respond to that.

**Researcher:** So what, what is your, what's your advice in terms of suggestion to promote, since we are in agreement that there is benefit from informal interaction because some teachers they like to keep that block, that barrier in between them and the students.

**Patricia:** I think saying this to them as well. I think the key thing is, as you were saying before, is just to build that rapport because they, they need, it makes everything easier as well. But also you have to trust them and show that you trust their abilities as well. And that you can, see potential in them, because all of us have different abilities and levels sometimes they feel uh, eh, that their efforts are not being acknowledged. So I think it's important that we show them that, that we can have a good relationship with them and that we trust them and that there is, mutual I would say. yeah, I mean, and mutual respect. It was fake. So was there I, they are very respectful but it's neutral. I can trust you and you can trust me. There's nothing to hide or you know, so you are open with what you expect from them and then they tell you as well.

**Alan:** I, I'd say that by developing that trust, then you do an extra respect. A lot of the students respond to that better.

**Patricia:** Yes, exactly.

**Researcher:** Okay. Well, uh, how about those teachers who were wary that that informal interaction becomes, you know, you need to have a barrier. Because students sometimes they want your mobile number, communicate with you through WhatsApp. Do you have any issues?

**Paul:** I never give out my mobile number to a student and I would never give out my personal info to a student. I've always, I've always maintained that you can be friendly without being friends. Yes. That's great. Yeah. That's how I like to conduct it for me. And it works very well because it is. You're acknowledging that. Yeah. If you- and I can give any of my own personal information, I can show photos of my family and talk about my kids. I can talk about my wife. It's not being of this country allows me certain freedoms. I can talk about the females in my family without worrying, that that's going to somehow make me overly vulnerable. But at the same time it humanizes me to the students and it shows them that I can see them as human. I don't need to, you know, and I've, I've had students ask for my number and I said, sorry I don't give my number to students. They don't seem to mind that.

**Alan:** But you can do that in a, in a polite way. You draw the lines, you say you know, and you've established the parameters of that relationship. I'm still your teacher. Yeah. You're still my student. You can be friendly in the classroom as you say. It doesn't mean you're going to develop a deeper relationship other than that, which is fine to still be friendly, to still interact, and still communicate. And to share things.

**Paul:** It also means when you do want to motivate them or we do want to, I don't want to say reprimands for, you know, when something happens, it's that old cliché of like, I'm not angry, I'm just disappointed. And that really works as really effective because if you're angry, someone is angry with you, you've got the option of just ignoring it, walking away. But if someone's disappointed, then that means that they expected more of you and that puts the obligation on the students. They think, well, if he thinks I'm capable of doing more than this, he thinks I can do better, why am I not? And I find that very effective.

**Zainab:** I think doing this also benefits, , how they understand the relationship between teachers and students because ultimately I think it's very one directional since high school that you listen, I talk, but that's not the case when the company very state and when we start doing that in the classroom, they know that actually this is a healthy engagement. I can actually interact with my teachers inside and outside the classroom, what the Vibe we want in tertiary education. We want them to see us as approachable. And when we were doing that and it's actually to create that bock, you know, to show them that we are actually approachable without actually going over the limit. But I do feel that, it also depends on the maturity of the students. Some of them when we are quite friendly with them, they feel that they can actually push the limit a little bit more. Yeah. So, I think that then it comes back to the teacher. You have to draw a line and did make it clear to the student. You know.

**Researcher:** What I found in line with that, especially in this part of the world, well I find the students attach lots of meaning to their relationship with their teacher and they build that wall, if they feel that that rapport is not there. whereas, you know, you expect maybe students maybe in the western countries. Yes. I, there's things I don't agree with or don't connect with this teacher. But I'm here, being professional. I'm here to learn. So from the emotional intelligence, there seem to be students, from my other research, I meet with them, they, they just like constantly refer back to their relationship. They're not looking at the content of the course, but they just take you back to how much they connect with their teacher.

### **Formal Interaction**

That leads us to the next role of the teacher, which is the formal, and let me just give you a definition. So formal interaction refers to the daily classroom teaching and learning process. So any aspect of teaching, teaching clarity, pedagogical practices, assessment, use of technology, active and collaborative learning. So any of you, what is a good teacher? Obviously the aspect that you mentioned, it is quite a skill to have to be able to connect informally but have a barrier. What else?

**Patricia:** It's hard to say.

**Zainab:** I think the students you're dealing with.

**Patricia:** But is it what's a good teacher from our perspective.

**Researcher:** Now, some of you have done some peer mentoring. You have observed, you know, teachers in the past what, or even yourself, reflect on yourself and say that was very good. We can get that from a good lesson. What goes on in that particular, for example, lesson, that you think this is good and a good teacher should actually have all of these aspects within their - well we're talking classroom.

**Zainab:** I think one of the important things that you should do is to always connect your lesson to the real life. In foundation or in program you do this, how do they apply it into real life? I think that's something that's very lacking now. How do you connect your lessons to real life and if you're able to, from your informal interactions with a student, maybe you want to include your discussion with them, you'll be like an incite information and it's something that is very intimate because only those people in the classroom will know, and I think that shows that you're paying attention to them when you talk, when you include those small things when you teach them in class. Like I was giving an example about football and I was teaching them revision scheduling yesterday, but I included things about football because all of them, they live, breathe, eat football and then they have the Manchester United and then they also named their cats Chelsea, Chihuahua, whatever, you know, so you, you, you pay attention to those small details and the actually respond positively to your lessons and I think that's what you want as well for them to enjoy the lesson.

**Patricia:** Engage as well, because what you do those connections make them more into the lesson today was I went to Mary's lesson and exactly what you were saying. I told her because it's, is that connecting, making those connections between the topic and the students experience as well as the teacher. Because they ended up talking about some kind of festivals and they were all sharing and then they come back to the content and then the personal experiences as well, so it's in that makes the lessons more meaningful and the students be more like they want to be part of because it doesn't feel like we are following this structure the superstructure lesson. It feels more like we are learning but we are at the same time talking about what's happened in our day.

**Researcher:** Okay. So this is bringing in students experiences and connecting with things they're interested in. Okay. That's more or less the same point. Is there anything else?

**Alan:** I would say adaptability. You have got to be able to wear many different hats throughout your lesson you have to change, you have to be able to adapt to a different type of student, different type of cohort, different group. You need to be able to seek the material that you're teaching, the resources that you're using. You've got to be very flexible because things can just change. You can't stick to a rigid plan or structure because it doesn't always work with every single group. So you need to know and you've got to identify which class you're able to do, what type of teaching, what type of methodology, getting cooperative. If you're not able to adapt, you'll struggle with the different kinds of cohorts that we would get.

**Researcher:** So you adapt based on the student's need, the type of level or you had to give variety regardless in what you do.

**Alan:** Always have a wide variety of ideas that you can bring the, most of us have that experience, we've been teaching a long time, but you have to see what you're capable of doing with that group. Each group is different. The culture, the classroom will be different with each group. What you can achieve with one is completely different to another. Moving from cycle to cycle as semester to semester, you need to have that adaptability.

**Researcher:** So yeah. In addition, would you recommend that variety in your instructions, how you, the delivery of your type of methods that you use in teaching like, for example, use of technology and you mentioned authentic materials. Is that also in your lesson plan?

**Alan:** It has to be because you need so many different approaches to get the students to learn to get them engaged. Some will respond to paper and pencil more than they will using the computer. Some, uh, embrace the technologies. Some fear the technology. If you're not prepared to adapt in that situation and you force for only one way, one style, you'll lose certain students. Some will engage with it. You got to be able to change.

**Researcher:** Okay. in terms of pedagogy, like how you - well first of all, what about assessments? Do you think it has an impact? Now we're talking the next stage of the impact of good teaching. How does that contribute to student success and retention? Let me just rewind, just because related to that question. Give us examples of the type of things that you would do with the students in your class to engage them.



**Paul:** I, I think, you know, I think you need to be engaging, but, uh, I think clarity is absolutely critical and, and I do agree with the fact that you have to be able to think on your feet and the doubt. But I also think to an extent, you need to be consistent in that students should be able to, they shouldn't be any big surprises to the students. They should be, they should be confident in knowing what they're, what you expect of them, and how to complete the task that you give them. So the expectations and the instructions need to be clear enough, so the students know this is where they need to be and this is how to get there. It shouldn't be a mystery. So to relate that to assessment, I think, an assessment for its own sake really doesn't have a lot of value. An assessment if it's, if it's a summative or formative assessment and that's, they're two very different things. Yeah. As we do these ongoing assessments well they're really there as tools to encourage learning, so they require feedback, they required reflection or acquire students being able to look at their results and understand why they've gotten the results they've gotten and what they need to do to achieve better the next time. If we're just sort of on this treadmill test and test and test, then I would question the value of that because you're just getting the same result again and again and again.

**Patricia:** I think this time of tests as well, the ones that the students are going through is they are not really showing it because it's all about numbers and sometimes the focus is is on that, is on numbers and I can see some of the students making progress and so they, for example, let's say in the writing, I can see that they are improving their writing because I've seen their work throughout the weeks, but then when they do a writing test, they don't get the results that make them progress, for example, and they feel like, "okay I failed", whereas I mean, I guess I can see their progress. So I think like, I don't know if you know what I mean-

**Alan:** I think I know you're saying, it's like how do you measure the progress? Certain assessments don't measure language development. They don't get to see, it's been able to do multiple choice tests where they genuinely know the answer. Sometimes they'll guess amounts of but they get it right. But does that actually show genuine progress. It depends on the type of assessment. That's the key as well. And as you suggested, you can actually see genuine progress being made, but can you measure that with a certain type of test? I don't think you can sometimes.

**Patricia:** Yeah. I would say, I mean this is scenario that we have, we could at least, you know, have any, I say a word in, in, in, in assessment because it seems that we, I see the results sometimes in the students, but I know, I know this, I know you're better than this, but I don't have any influence

on, on, on that. So I think, I don't know whether the assessments here are having any positive or negative effects on the students in some sort of motivation. Cause sometimes they feel “No I'm failing”. They just keep thinking “no I failed, I failed. I failed three times so it's all wrong”. So I feel, I feel for them because they should be able to see their progress as well.

**Researcher:** Okay. Uh, that's good enough. Just relate it to the contribution of good teaching, to student retention and success. If you have anything to say on that?

**Paul:** I think we'd all like to think that we have positive impacts on student retention and success. But I mean without hard studies... absoluting a control group that we ignore. Let's see how quickly they dropout.

**Researcher:** I mean you were saying about how you have the right team teaching, etc. Basically that engages students by engaging them in anything they are interested in, they're interested in learning more, and therefore, they are more likely to stay. That's where students spend most of their college time, it is actually in that classroom. What advice would you give to ... it's a bit similar because students, I tell you, have a lot to say about this. When you ask them what a good teacher is, they just don't want to stop. Is there any advice that you would give to your colleagues, in order to succeed in being a good teacher. It's difficult, I'm asking you to reflect on yourself.

**Paul:** I think being transparent with your expectations and the policies that you are going to work within, you know, as part of an institution. So, you know, it comes with that whole establishing rapport and you can have a negative backlash if the students get too familiar with you, they might start taking liberties, turning up late or missing classes and then expecting some sort of special consideration. So there's a balance there where you want to have a positive relationship with the students. You want to have a good atmosphere in the classroom, but at the same time you want the students to be, uh, taking it seriously enough that they engage with what you're doing in the classroom. And then they, then they come on time because I mean you're talking about retention and at risk. I mean one of the biggest causes of student attrition is when they exceed the attendance percentages. Now that's got nothing to do with testing, that's whether or not they turn up to class. And we can't really control much about that, beyond establishing a positive relationship with the students and being aware of what's going on with them. And, so, and, and, and if they, that if they think they can take liberties, they will. So I think it's very important to make sure that the students are all on the same page.

**Researcher:** Do you think that the students, since you are all language teachers, the students level of English being an Arabic speaker, which is not a Latin language. Is that a barrier or are there opportunities there?

**Alan:** I think it can be a barrier. The biggest barrier is culture. And I think it's expectations, I think you talking about new faculty and people coming that haven't had the experience. It's a steep learning curve when you come here, if you haven't had the experience of teaching Arabic students, Arab students coming from Far East. I was in a steep learning curve when I was there. European students, Asian students, Arab students, all different. They all bring with them different needs. Then you go to have realistic expectations. You know what your institution wants, you know you've got to deliver good results. But how do you go about that? You've got to learn very quickly in the, you have got to be prepared some, some you win, some you lose, you know the, the sort of battles and the battles with yourself. Really. You got to understand, I think what it is that you've, and you've worked, what are realistic expectations in the classroom, what the students want from you, what you want from them and what is actually achievable.

### **Academic Advising**

**Researcher:** Okay. Just moving to a different area, which is academic advising. So I would want to know how academic advising could influence student success and retention, and how would it be improved. So let's define academic advising. Academic advising, basically. That's why I'm doing it different because they do it differently in different programs. So academic advising is, it's about helping students navigate academic rules and regulations. So advisor, an advisor is expected to share their knowledge of major and degree requirement. Help students schedule their courses, which is what is happening in the program. It's limited at that. In foundation we do advising different way. I just want to ... tell me about, just pretend, I don't know. What is your experience of academic advising? The frequency, nature, relationship with the students, and is it useful? Just tell me in general, like we do two, three sessions. One is the whole group, then you do the one on one. Okay. Pretend that I'm not internal and tell us about that nature of that academic advising sessions you have with the students.

**Zainab:** I think since we function on cycles, we do academic advising quite regularly, I think up to two or three times across seven weeks. That is very active engagement. I think it's very clear that period because you didn't get to see their progress, especially if you have it on paper and then

you spell it out to them because some of them, they are very visual people. You might speak to them for two hours and nothing goes in. But when you put it on paper, you spelled it out to them. You go through it one by one and come out with achievable goals with them and worked with them on it. I think it is, it provides some of the kind of feedback that they are looking for. Then you know where to start and what you are expecting them to get at the end of the course. And I think for a lot of people, like even for myself, I feel that when my teacher, he sits me down one to one. I feel that number one, my, whatever weaknesses I have is hidden from my friends. I feel, I mean a safe spot. And then I have that one to one relationship with my teacher where I trust my teacher to actually guide me throughout the course. And I feel that is something that is very imperative when it comes to academic advising. You shouldn't just be like, okay, here's your paper, and this is what you should be doing, now you go. There's no discussion. You're not trying to find out why it's lacking like certain grades in this area, why this skill is an issue for him. And also maybe you want to give him input that worked for you when you were a student. You know, it might actually come in use for him.

**Researcher:** That's good. you mentioned different type of advising there. If it just like we had the schedule, this is how many cycles you have, that's part of advising, what you need to pass etc. I think you do lots of that, now you're talking about the other thing when you sit with the students. So think about you are.. Let's say that a student didn't have that type of interaction, which is advising the one on one, etc. Are there benefits in having that as, as opposed to not having? Because there was a time where there was no academic advising. What are the benefits of it?

**Paul:** I think for our students, especially in foundations, foundations is a transitional stage between what these guys have experienced in high school to what's expected from them once they get into the college and I think that's reflected in the way of the general studies academic advising and in that it's trying to help them to negotiate the obstacles in the administrative side. Essentially it's like these are your prerequisites, this is what you need to do to get onto this course. This is what you do. I, the way I see it when we do a sort of academic advising in foundation, so we've, we've got students who've come out of very different educational environments and I feel that part of our job was to try and transition them to a point where they're taking more agency for their learning, where they're taking more responsibility and part of that having the paper on, having the grades and the numbers is to show them, okay look, this is, this is where you are and this is how you can work

towards where you need to be. And a lot of our students really do expect to be spoon fed. And I think when you ask them, you know, what's a good teacher? I think the fact that they have so much to say on that topic is because there is a certain attitude that it's the teacher's responsibility to make sure I pass and if I failed somehow the teacher hasn't done the job. And I, and I think that's an attitude that's quite common amongst our students and, and to try and then get them to a point where they think, okay, no, actually it's my job as a student to get myself through this course. And if I don't get out of bed and I choose to stay at home and my agenda just gets to 14%, I have nobody to blame but myself and that's that's I think something that we, we try and foster is that idea that they need to take responsibility for their own situation.

**Researcher:** That's basically a tool by putting them through that process. Just the fact that that student comes ready, they know where they are, regardless if you are not giving them like the value added in terms of where they are at. We're just giving them, putting them through a process. Is there anything else that you could add about academic advising contributing to success and retention from your experiences? If there isn't, we can just move on. Is there anything that you would suggest to improve how academic advising is currently used?

**Alan:** I would say you can identify easily what strengths, certain strengths and weaknesses each student has, but the next stage ... how do they improve the study skills that are required? I think that their needs to be more attention paid to that. A lot of our students don't take notes in the classroom for example, and they've never been taught to or encouraged to. This is just one example. So the ones that do, do better in my experience, the ones that just try to listen, try to absorb everything by Osmosis don't go anywhere really or they'll still struggle. They don't go home and revise. Revision isn't a concept that they know and it's these kinds of study skills that I think we need to also attach to the advising.

**Researcher:** Okay. Do you think that language is a barrier where you are, because it's not like you're teaching content you are going beyond when you are interacting with students during advising sessions. is it better if it was done in like in Arabic, for instance?

**Alan:** It would be the case for level one and level two. Lower level students might benefit more from an explanation in Arabic but we're in the process of developing their language skills, I think academic advising in level two helps them as well. We've got to understand these terms. We've got to see it as a process.

**Researcher:** So you don't find that the content is too heavy for that because maybe you have a portfolio in front of them-

**Alan:** It is how it's done. I mean we are talking about the skills that I think there's a difference between when a program, when you're advising because they're supposed to have the language skills or certain level. What you are then teaching is genuine content. We mistake when particularly when it comes to assessments that our content is just development of language skills and that is a process, the way you go about that. Advising is part of that process.

**Researcher:** Now you know in some institution advising is done by academic advisor who is an admin. In some institutions they even have it online. Do you think there is a benefit, the fact that advising is actually done by the teacher and also the teacher who actually teaches those students?

**Zainab:** Yeah, because you know your students. Yeah, and I agree with the other person just now. She said you the student might not be fussy, but you seek progress. Only the teacher teaching that student would know that student is capable of certain things and it's important that you give feedback or input that a student can benefit from and you can't do it if you don't know this student, you're not giving valuable input. It's just trying to tick off boxes, like this is your task, tell the student to enroll or whatnot. I don't think there's any engagement. I feel that it'll be much, much better if the teacher teaching this student does it herself instead of someone else. I think that it means that we'll focus on a different aspect of what he or she is required to do and not so much on the academic side. Whether this is actually beneficial for the student to take part in.

**Researcher:** Do you agree with that?

**Paul:** Yeah. I can't speak to what institutions do and I've seen other situations if they've got more teachers in different areas and they're studying a lot of different subjects, but our students, they really have one main teacher and they're studying one course, so it makes sense to have that main teacher.

**Researcher:** Okay, so basically you are in agreement that it's better done by a teacher as opposed to an admin person?

**Paul:** Yes.

**Researcher:** Let's say if it's done by a teacher who doesn't teach you that particular section. Let's say you switch. Is there any benefit in that or you still want to stick to the fact that we need to know the students?

**Zainab:** I think you need to know the commitment of the student in the classroom, that is related to the result that you're seeing right now. And only the class teacher would know. Again, we are fortunate because we can handle that group. We have up to 25 students per class, but honestly I don't think we can manage to do that with each student if we have 40 students of class, you know the quality of input that you're giving the student might be far different than what you're doing now. I really feel that the student's character and motivation, commitment in the classroom affects the results that you're seeing and only the class teacher would know the results that you're seeing-

### **Mentoring**

**Researcher:** Okay, that point moves nicely to the next and last point, which is student mentoring. let me just tell you what that means. So we are looking at going to look at how mentoring contributes to student success and how it could be improved. Now mentorship refers to the emotional commitment that extends beyond sharing degree requirement. There is the next step to beyond academic advising and most of what you are talking about, which is not necessarily happening in program and that is mentoring which, which is, which happens in foundation. So mentoring, you're talking about the mentoring relationship and rooted in a mentors long term caring about the students. Personal and professional development. So you're talking about beyond, it's that caring. So that's the definition. And in in the literature they say that it hasn't had its share of research, mentoring, and often it is used with academic advising interchangeably. Now you know what it means, what it is. I think you mentioned, you mentioned your experiences of mentoring, which is what you mentioned in the informal and formal, etc. how does it, so that caring attitude beyond just the academic, how does that contribute to student retention and success. Or, or just to make things easier, you know, you can tell me about what, what do you suggest that ...

you can talk about your experience as a mentor, yeah, lots of what we are calling academic advising is actually mentoring. Any of you, how you can tell us about your experience with mentoring or you can even mention how it contributes to the success or is there anything that we can do to improve the mentoring process within the institution, not just the department? It is a difficult concept because people don't, even when you read about mentoring, it's, you don't find it there.

**Paul:** It's a very hard thing to measure, isn't it? How do you measure the value of that kind of interaction? It's not very quantifiable. So I don't know how it contributes to retention and success. I mean, I feel like it's a positive thing. I feel like it adds value to their experience as students. I feel like it's good for students to have that kind of interaction and I also feel like there are students who definitely need that kind of guidance beyond simply, you know, this is how you study or this is what you need to work on. Because I mean I have students who come into class looking like they've been up all night and then I asked them and yes they have indeed been up all night. So I say to them, your homework is to go home and sleep in bed before 9:00 PM I mean is that, is that academic advising? Is that mentoring?

**Researcher:** That is mentoring. I mean I would like to hear some more examples of you know, what you just said it, you noticed something about the students and you know, student looking tired. With some teachers it's just like, you're not here, you're not here. It's very rigid. Maybe give us examples of how you go that extra mile.

**Patricia:** It's like going back to what we were talking before, in that relationship you have with the students that they trust you. Sometimes you don't need to ask them. They approach you and they tell you what was happening, what's wrong with them, because you can notice sometimes they are not the same and ... making my case for example, I don't ask them anything but they do really liberate it. They just approach and say miss I'm not well. They wait to be alone because sometimes they have some personal issues.

**Researcher:** So do they tell you or do you ask them?

**Patricia:** No, I don't ask them. I, I just, I know say I know I don't force them to, okay do the work now is like okay I just come, do you work on it? I said there's not, I don't say anything, and it is what you were saying before, I don't get angry but like I know you can do more and it's okay, don't do it. And they approach you and then they tell you what was wrong with them and sometimes-

**Researcher:** So you made yourself that approachable type of teacher? What if they don't? Do you actually, do you think the teacher should actually go up to the student?

**Alan:** Sometimes you have to. Students fall into different categories. The ones that you don't even really need to worry about, they're engaged to getting on with the work they're fine. You see the social interactions, you know that they're okay, good. Certain introverts and extroverts. Some need



sort of reigning in because they're dominating the class in the wrong way. And what's the reason behind that? And then you've got the introverts, the quiet ones, the shy ones, uh, maybe not engaging, not doing as much. What's the story there? So essentially what do you want? You want all of your students to be participating and completing the activities and tasks and doing the best that they can. How do you reach out to those students that aren't doing that kind of thing? You've got to be able to, as you've identified, see that there is an issue and then try to get that person to talk to you. Sometimes I'll do it after class. It's just I, you know, called the student's name and "just got a minute". What's the story? What's going on? He tried to get some information that you can work with and then you then they start to open up. You find that they will then start to share what their problems might be, what their issue is, and then you tried to work with it. You realize that maybe that person needs a softly, softly approach. Maybe it actually needs a sterner approach, inside the coaching style, isn't it. Some need the arm around the shoulder and some need a lot more encouragement.

**Researcher:** Which is all part of engaging the students and promoting their success.

**Alan:** I find that the students respond to that. They liked that because they the, you're showing that you care and they in turn mostly will have a positive reaction to that.

**Zainab:** And I've had this one experience where I've had this one student who actually makes money out of social media. It was my first year teaching here. It was really interesting because I notice that he was always alone in the class. He was ostracized by his peers and he was, he was on medication for depression and he had up to 100,000 followers on Instagram, but he did not have the maturity because he was only 18 he did not have the maturity to handle all the heat that social media brought along and it was affecting him in the classroom. And I think if the teachers don't pay attention to those cues, that boy might slip into something more serious. Because in my previous workplace, we had students who committed suicide and ran away from home and stopped coming to classes, it escalates to that level. So the student needed someone who could actually come in and had the same interest or is able to have the same sort of mentality as him and give him sound advice on how to deal with social media and all the jealousy that comes along with it. Because obviously his peers were quite jealous of him for having all this fame online and he comes from a very good family, you know, and I think it extends further than his behavior in the classroom. You know, I don't know what he would do outside the classroom if you just ignore

him, you know, you're not paying attention to all these stresses that he showed me in class because social media is a big influence with these guys. They bullying on snapchat and everything, you know, I think it's very important that you pay attention to it.

**Researcher:** Now, we're are nearly there. With the mentoring, it requires, you're getting into more specifics, not like academic advising and with certain students, it required a certain level of English. So there they are, they're connecting with you regardless of their level of English. So they want to talk to you about an issue which requires certain level of English., how do you go about that? Especially if they are level 1.

**Patricia:** I have the experience of, but we always have good communication because when we don't know we use google translate. So what I wanted, sometimes they don't understand what I'm saying because I cannot find the basic vocabulary to say. So I just type in on the same computer, but we use that. I mean, that's the tool, because you know, level one, the level is limited to what's within the class? Sometimes it's a little bit difficult to talk.

**Researcher:** Language has no barriers when it comes to ... as long as that connection is-

**Patricia:** I've had a trustee to be my translator. It's plan B you know.

**Zainab:** It helps some time because sometimes I, I have the translator. No, that's not what I mean.

**Researcher:** It seems to me from what you're saying, but this is really, it's like personal ethics for you as a teacher wanting to connect and develop. But you feel that there is enough of it in the college and should there be something-

**Paul:** Formalise?

**Researcher:** Yes.

**Paul:** I think it'd be a difficult thing to formalise, but I think you could do it. Uh, you would have to have some sort of program where students were assigned a mentor and you would want those people to be prepared and ... the right temperament to do that. Because I mean, what we're talking about, it's very informal. Something that happens in the classroom, it's just another one of those hats that you wear as a teacher. Sometimes you're a counselor, sometimes you're a friend, sometimes you're an entertainer, sometimes you're an instructor. And I think if, I think there's definitely scope for it to be more formalized and some students would really benefit from it.

**Researcher:** And that person being the teacher?

**Paul:** I don't think that in that case, I don't think it would have to be the teacher. I think. I think that's- you're getting into counselor territory?, I don't, I mean I don't think it would be a problem if it was the teacher, but I don't think it necessarily has to be the teacher. I mean what if, what if the student is having issues with the teachers that they've got in the class? What if that's part of the issue or what if they're not comfortable teaching or talking about something to someone that they see everyday in the classroom. I mean there's a lot of different layers to that student teacher relationship. They might not want to share certain things with the teachers because of the position or the relationship between them. So it might be better if there was somebody who was an impartial third party that was tasked with, you know, just giving these guys a sounding board.

**Researcher:** Okay.

**Alan:** I'd say as well for certain issues you might genuinely need a professional. More of a trained psychologist, counselor. We've alluded to, we all wear many different hats, but if we're, we don't have the expertise, you could do more harm than good. You've got to know where to draw the line sometimes, I think, and what we do is try to get our students engaged, try to get our students working with us, we do the best that we can so that they feel that they're comfortable. If there is an issue, they'll share it. For example, I wouldn't feel comfortable if it's an abuse issue. Yeah. We know that there's certain things, I can go so far. But then you genuinely do need the professionals to come in for certain cases.

**Researcher:** You don't want to become too involved.

**Alan:** Exactly. Yeah.

**Researcher:** So from what I'm seeing you're 50-50 in terms of teacher as a mentor, yes, it can be done, but within limit. How about you two?

**Patricia:** I think like you just said, we can mentor them in certain things, but then when you were mentioning, I know you were mentioning about this bullying or any other issue, I think I would feel comfortable enough.

**Zainab:** I also feel, I agree, but I also feel that the teacher must genuinely care about the student she's teaching. It's very important. Because the kind of advice, the approaches you use, your, your

need to help them comes from inside. It's not your teacher training. This is teaching from the heart and it's difficult if you just think about, I'm paid this salary, I'm just going to do what I'm paid for and then I'm going to go teach the class.

**Researcher:** Okay. So basically, yeah, from what I'm hearing that there's a need for some form of mentoring to happen. If it's formal, whatever form there needs to be mentoring and mentoring should happen regardless of what other mentoring it should happen within the classroom and the teacher, regardless of whether it's formalized or not. Correct. Okay., it's just a final question. Do you have anything to add about the role of the teacher in the areas that we have mentioned? You think maybe this is an important area that we haven't covered that you think it's important.

**Zainab:** I think depending, I can't speak for everyone, but I feel that I'm kind of lucky because I, I share the same religious background. So sometimes when they're misbehaving class I'll just quote something from the quran and then they'll be like, okay, it is, they see me as their muslim sister. Actually. I can play that card on them and they would actually listen just they say I am your brother and this is the first time that I'm experiencing it is because in Malaysia, I teach international students, we might not share the same religious spectrum but over here the whole class, these guys get my nuances sometimes and they get my, halal jokes. I think that's something interesting. And also they will actually look out for you because you're they're your sister, you know? And I think it's a very interesting experience, honestly.

**Researcher:** It's an interesting point and a whole area of research.

**Zainab:** And the language as well because we share the same words. Some of the vocabulary in my country is the same as Arabic. Sometimes when they say it in class, I know what they are seeing and I can participate.

**Researcher:** One thing that I noticed, do you think, I notice when I observe you that you all use Arabic words, all of you. Do you find, how do you feel that actually helps you with that connection?

**Alan:** I'll make a genuine point, I never do. I never, no, I've never used it.

**Researcher:** You don't say 'Shabbab'?

**Alan:** Never. I don't use any words like that. I just don't feel comfortable with the language enough to be able to.

**Paul:** I actually, I, I use them, that's one of the reasons I do use Arabic because I feel like if they hear my terrible pronunciation, they won't feel so bad about making mistakes in English.

**Researcher:** Good point.

**Paul:** I use Arabic for very basic words. I use it for grammatical words, my word forms and verb and Noun, an adjective. I use the Arabic words for those.

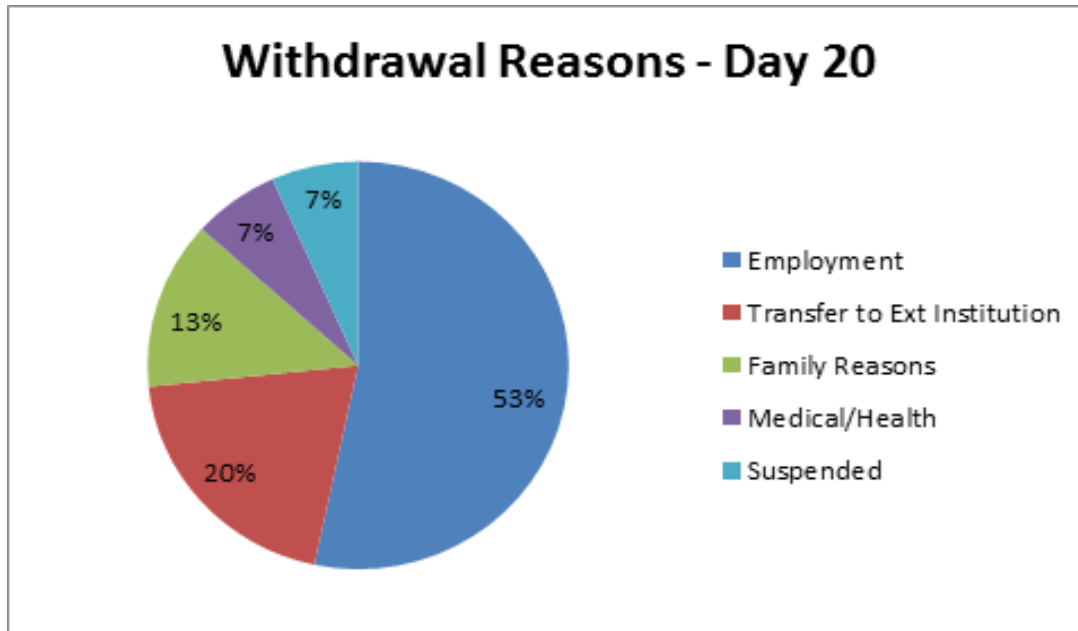
**Researcher:** Sometimes I walk in class and I speak in Spanish with Patricia and they're like "what are you saying?". Okay, well. Thank you very much. I really thank you for your effort and time. So basically, as I said, yeah, your participation in this, you can withdraw whatever you said and you can decline and say that you don't want to be taking part in this. So as is stated in the forms. And so thank you again. I really appreciate this. And as you know, this will hopefully bring benefit. I'd be able to share with you the details of this research when it's all done. If you are interested, you can contact me at a certain stage and thank you.

## Appendix 12 - SENSE Survey

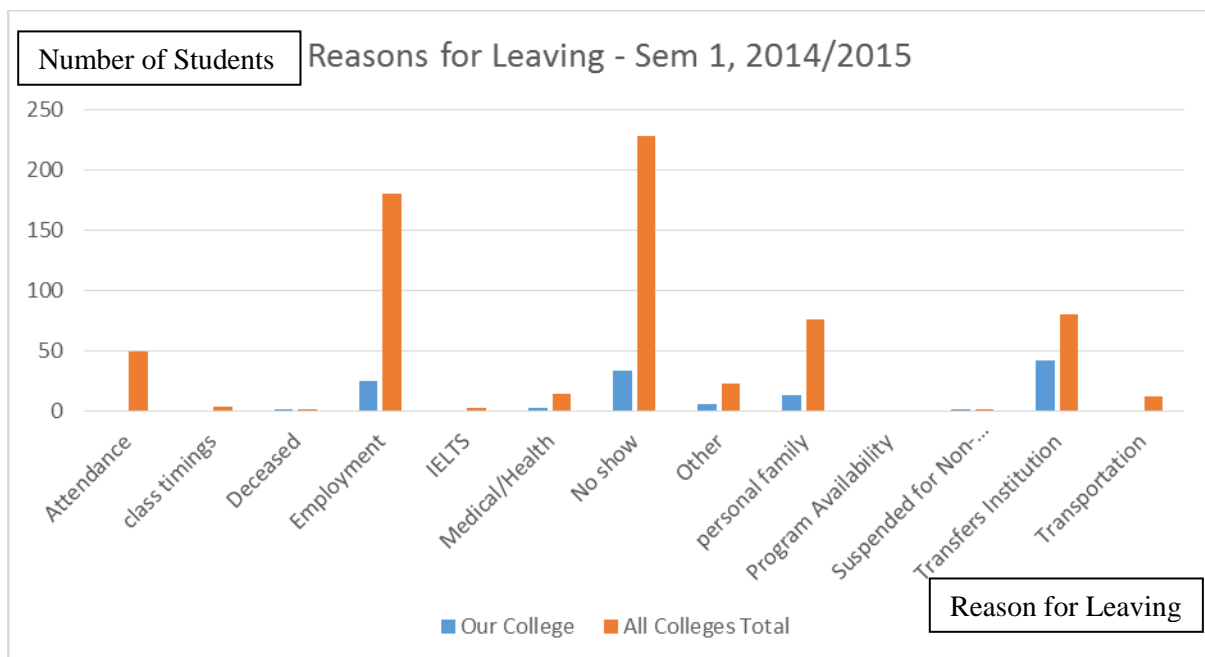
Foundations - SENSE Results					
		SENSE Results 201420		SENSE Results 201410	
	Item/Campus	College	System Overall	College	System Overall
	Total Student (New) Count	32	442	125	3444
	Response Rate	97%	82%	83%	69%
1	I am happy with my decision to come to this College	90%	87.3%	87%	83%
2	The first time I came to College I felt welcome	81%	73.6%	78%	74%
3	I can find my way around the College	76%	81.5%	83%	83%
4	The teachers make me feel comfortable in class	89%	84.1%	88%	82%
5	I know who I should go to if I need help	81%	80.1%	82%	79%
6	I know how to contact my teacher if I need help	69%	75.0%	71%	73%
7	I understand how to progress in the programme I am in	78%	79.1%	79%	76%
8	I understand the consequences of cheating	84%	86.8%	88%	88%
9	I understand the College attendance policy	81%	84.6%	86%	87%
10	I understand the conduct expected of me as an a student	87%	88.1%	89%	88%
11	I can easily use Portal	73%	80.0%	81%	82%
12	I can easily use the College email	78%	81.4%	82%	85%
13	I know what College facilities are available to me	73%	79.8%	79%	82%
14	I am getting to know other students in my class	83%	84.0%	85%	83%
15	I understand how to use technology to help me learn	80%	82.9%	83%	84%
16	The extracurricular activities offered in the College appeal to me (e.g. clubs, sport, societies)	81%	75.7%	74%	73%

17	I have settled in well in the first four weeks of College	82%	82.5%	79%	81%
18	I would recommend the College to my friends and family	89%	85.0%	84%	81%
	<b>Overall</b>	<b>81%</b>	<b>81.7%</b>	<b>82%</b>	<b>81%</b>

## Appendix 13 - Withdrawal Reasons Data



**Semester 1 - 2013/2014. Source: College Data**



**Attrition figures of Semester 1 2014/2015 – College Data.**



## Appendix 14 - Focus Group 2, Participant Profiles

	Pseudonym	Remarks
1	Omar	Transferred from another institution following recommendations by his guardians and family members. He started college at a low level of English. He had a turbulent time during his first semester at the college and struggled to settle. Omar had major attitude issues, which led to conflicts with most of his teachers. The guardians were heavily involved during his early days at the institution. He made tremendous academic improvement during the second semester of the foundation year, especially after passing English and acquiring IELTS band 5; this was a big turning point. Omar continued to be a very successful and motivated student in his engineering major. He often came to greet me and talk about his appreciation of the one-to-one interactions he had with various staff members and how that helped him settle and succeed.
2	Hassan	A mature non-traditional student. Extremely motivated and in full-time employment but with special permission to leave work early. He did not have any formal education and studied at home instead. He managed to get a high school certificate with a grade that barely allowed him to access tertiary education. Due to gaps in his learning, Hassan found it very difficult to adapt to the academic demands of the foundation programme bearing in mind that he was at the English starter level according to the Cambridge University scales. Started college in Level 1. He did not progress to his major after spending a whole year in the English course and was forced to withdraw subsequent to doing this focus group.

3	Saif	Saif had a stuttering issue which affected his social engagement. He stuttered more when in unfamiliar settings and when with people he did not know. Also featured in focus group 1, as shown above. Progressed to his IT (information technology) major after doing this focus group, but continued to have poor attendance.
4	Abdulaziz	Missed the first week when joining the college due to his military service engagements but managed to catch up. Highly motivated and confident. Started at a low level of English as an afternoon student even though he was not working, he was allowed to move to the afternoon shift to balance up student numbers. Was thinking about leaving due to the college rules and regulations, especially those concerning his attendance. Progressed to his engineering major subsequent to being in this focus group.
5	Laith	A sponsored student who started in Level 1. Intrinsically motivated. Passed English but struggled to pass maths. Missed two weeks during one of the two cycles due to a military service refresher course which affected his progress. Did not progress to his major and withdrew due to work commitments after doing this focus group. Had the potential to progress in his studies.
6	Muath	Weak and very quiet and reserved. The father suggested that he should join this institution. Progressed to his engineering major after participating in this focus group.
7	Faisal	Academically weak. Had attendance issues. Come from a rural background.
8	Mahmoud	Had already passed English before joining college after obtaining an IELTS band five from an external testing centre. Did maths at foundation level but struggled to pass after numerous attempts. He eventually made it to his engineering major. Mahmoud was in the arts' stream at school but starting from academic year 2017/2018 students like him needed to have over 70% in

		their high school overall grade and not less than 80% in maths. Before this requirement, there was no qualifying condition, which explains why he was still struggling.
9	Khalid	Missed two weeks of the semester and struggled to make up for the lost work. Started in Level 2, which he repeated because he was withdrawn for attendance reasons. He nearly left college but had some academic advising session with his class teachers. Made steady progress all the way to Level 4 and progressed to his engineering major subsequent to participating in this focus group.

## Appendix 15 - Focus Group 3, Participant Profiles

Pseudonym	Details
Sultan	Made steady progress from Level 2 to 3 then 4. Spent a whole academic year in the English Foundation Programme before progressing to his major. Chose business as a major.
Zayed	Joined college at Level 4 of English, but was a little short of meeting the English requirements. Spent a semester in the foundation before moving to his major. Chose business as a major.
Rashed	Started in foundation Level 3 and was able to take a challenge exit exam due to his high Level 3 score. Spent a semester at foundation level before moving to his major. Chose Computer Information Systems (CIS) as a major.
Mubarak	Started in Level 3 foundations and repeated the level and progressed to Level 4. Spent a whole academic year in the English Foundation Programme before progressing to his major. Chose business as a major.

## Appendix 16 - Focus Group 4, Participant Profiles

Pseudonym	Details
Salem	A business major student who needs a pre-requisite Maths course.
Tariq	Joined college in 2016 to study English and maths. Left and came back in the second semester of 2018/2019 after having acquired the IELTS from an external institution. Registered in a pre-requisite Physics course. Is an Engineering major student.
Abdelkader	A business student who need to complete a pre-requisite Maths course.
Talal	Was registered in pre-requisite Maths and Physics courses. Managed to get equivalency for several courses from a previous institution. Highly motivated. Is an engineering major student.
Saud	An engineering student who is registered in a pre-requisite Physics course, as high school leaving grades were inadequate.

## Appendix 17 - Focus Group 5, Participant Profiles

Pseudonym	Details
Zainab	A non-native English teacher who has taught at the college for three years. Actively involved in student life activities such as extracurricular activities. Students regard her as a big sister.
Alan	A native English speaker, who has taught at the college for six years. Student-centred and very dedicated. Involved in various student success initiatives.
Paul	A native English teacher at the college for three years. Highly motivated and often goes the extra mile in helping students. Creative in his approach to academic advising and mentoring.
Patricia	Non-native English speaker. She has been working in college for four years. Interested in working with students with low levels of English ability. Highly motivated.

## Appendix 18 - Focus Group 6, Participant Profiles

Pseudonym	Details
Adel	A computer information systems teacher, bilingual Arabic and English. Has been working in the institution for six years.
Mark	Native English speaker for health science. Has been working in the institution for five years.
Aziz	Non-native English speaking teacher. Has been teaching in the veterinary programme for two years.
Fadel	Non-native English speaking – teaches in the engineering department – mechatronics. Has been working in the institution for three years.
Ziad	Non-native English speaking – teaches in the engineering department - electronics. Has been working in the institution for two years.